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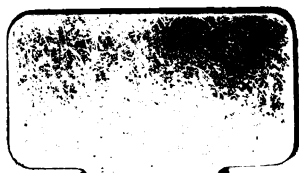
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A DARK SECRET.

BY

ELIZA RHYL DAVIES,

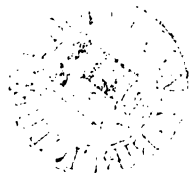
AUTHOR OF

"THE MYSTERY OF ASHLEIGH MANOR."

"The idea of thy life shall sweetly creep,
Into my study of imagination;
And every lovely organ of thy life
Shall come apparelled in more precious habit—
More moving delicate, and full of life,
Into the eye and prospect of my soul,
Than when thou livedst indeed."

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.



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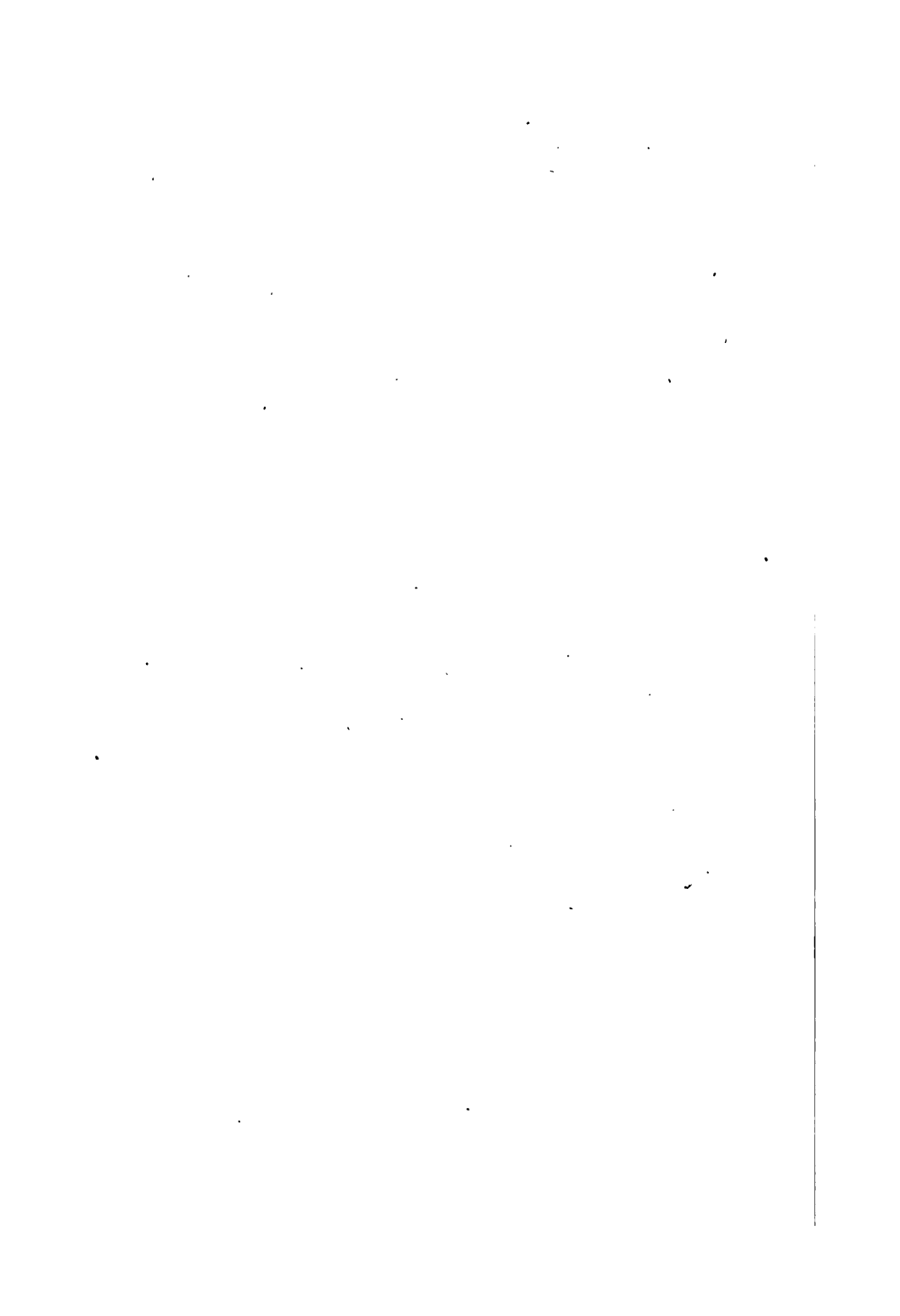
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A DARK SECRET.



CHAPTER I.

ON THE BRINK.

“ He stood, a stranger in this breathing world,
An erring spirit . . .
A thing of dark imagings, that shaped
By choice the perils he by chance escaped.”

Lara.

THE weeks passed swiftly. September came and levelled the broad and golden fields, and gave an edging of flame-colour to the topmost leaves of the trees, and plucked the brightest flowers, and filled

the country with busy men and overflowing waggons, and the air with the clinking of scythes.

This September is not a jocund month, albeit the farmers make a festival of it, and the moon it brings seems the sweetest, the largest, the clearest, that shines all the year round.

In truth, those who look with a sober eye on nature, and seek that spirit of hers which lies within and beneath the rich and bounteous gifts she lavishes around in this her great season of abundance, behold her despondent with the presentiment of winter, and witness a perceptible decay of the glory that seemed eternal in the month gone by. There seems, indeed, a note of sadness in all things, and something of an earthy and a rotting flavour in the ripe

perfumes which burden the wind, let it
blow from what quarter it will,

“ He comes ! he comes ! in every breeze the Power
Of Philosophic Melancholy comes !”

exclaims Thomson, giving a buckram interpretation to an emotion, which Wordsworth has imitated and made his own by using purer and simpler words,—

“ O’er all the soul his sacred influence breathes !
Inflames imagination ; through the breast
Infuses every tenderness : and far
Beyond dim earth exalts the swelling thought !”

The music of the scythe is the knell of the summer, and by a fantasy we may figure nature looking a mild reproach at her sons who strip her of her splendour and antedate the touch of the despoiling monarch whose home is in the frozen north,

The weeks which have passed have left matters much as they were as regards the little interests with which this story deals.

And yet there are one or two things to write about.

In the first place, we who are deep in the secret of Dr. Fraser's misery will look for no change in him, but rather indulge in abundant conjectures as to the nature of the miracle that is to restore his peace of mind, or, if such peace be not in store for him, the quality and character of the result of the deep misfortune which a moment of ungovernable passion had overwhelmed him with.

But Helen, though she might be on the very threshold of discovery, was as yet as far from knowing the reason of his unhap-

piness, and the mystery of his association with Creed, as she had ever been.

She had given up all hope of getting Louis's sympathy for the undeterminable suspicions and strange doubts and fears that haunted her.

He dined frequently with Dr. Fraser, and frequently when Creed was of the company; and had as frequently avowed to Helen that he could witness nothing in this friendship between the two men to cause him to suppose that there was anything more in it than was implied in Fraser's liking for the society of a man who could understand his allusions, enjoy his wit, appreciate his learning, and indulge him in conversation on subjects which pleased him to talk about.

That the doctor was pale, that the doc-

tor had a careworn look, that he stooped in his gait, that his glances were now fugitive, restless, and evasive, Louis admitted. But even if this change were not as Fraser declared it to be, attributable to a change in his constitution, he could not for the life of him see what Mr. Creed had to do with it. He would not go so far as to say that he liked Creed, or that Fraser showed good sense in limiting his choice of society to this man, who was not a gentleman, though he was clever and well-educated. But he owned that he thought Creed quite as good company as Bush or Rodgers, or as a good many others he could name; and if he was more familiar perhaps¹ than men who considered themselves his betters would relish, he did his best to be obliging, and performed his own

natural part not so intolerably but that he might even please prejudiced persons.

So Helen, finding Louis against her, ceased to refer to Mr. Creed, but did not the less dislike him and puzzle herself again and again with the mystery which was as apparent to her as her own hands.

There was one matter, indeed, she would have given worlds to speak about to Louis, but was stopped for want of power to explain herself.

Like all her other attempted charges against Creed, this too would have appeared hazy, and therefore wrong.

To say that he made love to her would be a monstrous extravagance. Such a defined attitude would positively have comforted her by enabling her to grasp his meaning and end it. But how was she to

deal with a manner that conveyed everything, whilst it totally eluded all definition, whilst it defied her to explain it ; whilst, in a word, it made itself felt without making itself understood ?

Such subtlety was weird, it was ghost-like, it shocked and terrified : it seemed a power gifted with the same means to cover and enfold that the night has, which creeps and deepens and darkens with a force that is irresistible, but with a force that is not to be touched or determined.

She could not speak of this thing, because there were no words she knew to express what was an instinctive but not an intellectual perception.

Dislike : that was the only term in which she could embody the misgivings no language could convey. Dislike : and

it was a relief to her to feel that these misgivings, these doubts, these shapeless and uncorroborated accusations were not all so visionary and vague but that they could influence her mind to one determinable emotion towards him.

Creed came one evening, early in September, after dinner, and was shown into the study where the doctor was.

We must not suppose that on the occasion of his visits he and Fraser always remained in the study until it was time for him to go. The fiction of the book-making was still kept up, but very flimsily and unskilfully, insomuch that Helen had quite made up her mind to believe that her father had tired of his history and was no longer working at it.

Creed liked her society, and once so far

forgot the part he had declared it incumbent on him and Fraser to play, that he proposed—out of very weariness of the tiresome imposture—to join Miss Fraser in the drawing-room, and the doctor, his humble slave, consented.

This done once was done afterwards, again and again ; the study was now but a temporary lounging-place after dinner ; the greater part of the evening was spent by the doctor and Creed with Helen.

But on this early September evening Creed was shown into the study, and there he remained.

The time passed, and Helen, in the dining-room, with her work-basket at her side, expected every moment to see the doctor enter, followed by his friend.

How she hated these intrusions ! How

she would cast about in her mind for excuses to leave the room and hope that Louis would call and come between her and that nameless manner of Creed's which shocked and frightened her!

At such times it was that she most felt the power of the mystery that baffled her; for though it must have been as manifest to Fraser as any visible object his eye rested upon, that his daughter hated and feared and shrank from Creed, he would never scruple to use the extraordinary influence he possessed over her, which a look or a gesture would exert as effectually as a spoken command, to make her docile and amiable to his companion.

But eight o'clock struck, and then the half hour, and then nine; but Creed did not come.

Well, the longer he lingered in the study the less time he would have to spend with her.

There was a roll of calico in her bedroom which she wanted, and she left the dining-room to go upstairs. But as she passed the study she was arrested, as suddenly as if a hand had been laid on her shoulder, by her father's voice.

What he uttered she could not hear; the door was stout and lined with baize, that deadened the sound; but it could not deaden the note of agony which rang through the doctor's voice, and which raised and sharpened it almost to the shrillness of a scream.

Her heart beat furiously, and so thumped in her ears that she could hear little more than its pulsation.

There was a quarrel, she was sure of that; and now she heard Creed's voice in a subdued rejoinder, of which the words were quite inaudible.

It seemed to her that she might grasp that secret now, the knowledge of which had been for many weeks a passionate longing; but she was governed by an inexorable sense of honour that drove her away, and when she passed the study on her return, the voices within were silent.

After twenty minutes she heard the hall door close, and then her father came into the room alone.

She could scarcely believe that Creed would not follow him, and a thrill passed through her as she hoped they had quarrelled, and he would return to the house no more.

She looked earnestly at her father, who was white to positive ghastliness, but he did not seem to heed her glances as formerly, nor avert his face, nor cover up his expression with a frown.

He took several turns about the room without speaking, and presently flung himself into a chair with a movement impelled by many feelings.

"Is Mr. Creed gone for good, papa?" she asked nervously, and with a tremor in her voice she could not disguise.

"Do you mean for always?" he asked.

"Will he return to night?"

"No."

"Will he never come again, papa?"

"Why do you ask me these questions? Yes—no—what do I care? do you want

him?" he said, speaking in a tone of deep excitement.

"If I thought he would never come again," she exclaimed, "I should be very happy."

"Well, perhaps so," he answered, under his breath, looking at the carpet.

"He has made you miserable, and I know—I know he is a bad man," she continued, letting fall her work and clasping her hands, whilst she looked at him with an expression in her eyes so full of love and grief that it seemed but the merest shadow of a gesture was needful to bring her to his side, and hold her there on her knees.

"Why do you think he is a bad man?" he asked sharply.

The question smote her doubly: first,

she felt that if they had quarrelled, the quarrel was not irreparable, or the question would not have been asked ; and next, it appealed to an instinct she could not explain, and her silence would therefore make her charge silly.

He repeated the question.

She paused a moment, and then said slowly, labouring, so to speak, to master and conceive her intangible impression,—

“ He has an influence over you, and it has changed you, and so I am sure the influence is a wicked one, and that he is wicked to possess it.”

She feared this would anger him, but he laughed harshly and replied,—

“ I always thought you had too good an opinion of me to suppose that I could yield to an evil influence.”

She said quickly and in a febrile whisper,—

“There is a secret understanding between you and him, papa, and that gives him power over you.”

He started as if he had been struck, but recovered himself and gazed at her steadily without answer.

Once a strange look came into his face, an expression she had never seen on it before—a yearning, a longing, that seemed born of despair, a look of wild and fierce honesty, as if it were in the man’s thoughts to pour forth his whole mind.

But this passed, and there came an interval of frightful internal struggle, which shook and convulsed him, and Helen heard him breathing quickly and deeply.

"Do you talk to Louis?" he asked, presently, "about Creed and me?"

"Sometimes."

"And he thinks with you that Creed is a devil and has bewitched me?"

He said this as if he would be jocular, but he uttered the word *devil* vehemently.

"He thinks me uncharitable because I admit a prejudice that I cannot explain. But am I not right? Oh, papa, you know."

"I?" he exclaimed quickly: "what do I know? Creed isn't a handsome man—he has a bad figure—he doesn't look one in the face; few women would like him."

"Not that! he has a bad heart—he is a wicked man—he has made you afraid of him! Oh, papa!" she burst out, running up to him and laying her hands on his

arm : " don't let him be your friend—don't let him come near us again !"

He knitted his eyebrows as he looked at her and was about to speak, but checked himself.

" Pshaw !" he said, and waved his hand.

But he sunk his head and lost himself for some moments in deep thought.

She was acting a bold part that astonished her in thus thrusting herself upon him and drawing so close to the mystery which she had surveyed heretofore at a distance, with awe and pain. She never knew how much she loved him until she felt the courage her love gave her to break through the habitual restraint he imposed.

She knelt by his side and clasped her hands upon his arm.

"Papa," she cried, her eyes streaming, her face working under the emotion that possessed her, "will you not take me into your confidence? You know how I love you. You know that I would die for you, papa. One little word would tell me why you are so changed, so pale, so careworn, why you have Mr. Creed with you whom you hate, whom you are polite and kind to when I have seen you look at him as if he were your bitter enemy. Tell me, papa! let me help you to fight this bad man. What does he know? what has he done? May we not defy him so that your happiness may come back to you?"

Again the yearning look that was pitiable to see entered his face and faded. He turned his head aside, and leaning back in his chair, said softly,—

"Helen, what do you suspect?"

"Nothing—and everything," she answered with a sob.

"See now what prejudice does. When Tom Thumb in Fielding's play made his giants he killed them. You make your giants—and leave others to dispatch them."

He released his arm from her hands and left his chair.

Helen rose from her knees and there was a silence that lasted some minutes.

In this interval his mood changed : his step grew irritable : a fire kindled in his eyes. He stopped suddenly and looked at her suspiciously.

"What made you think that Creed had left me for good?" he demanded.

"I asked you if he had, papa."

"Because he did not join you this evening?"

She hesitated and answered,—

"Partly because of that : and because I thought you had quarrelled."

"Did you hear our voices?"

He held his breath to catch the reply.

"Yes, but not your words. I heard *your* voice raised in anger as I passed the study."

"Did you listen?"

The question wounded her and she coloured up vehemently, but answered nevertheless meekly, "No, papa."

"It is true that we had some words ; but arguments are unavoidable between people who are much together. Attach no significance to what you overheard.

Mr. Creed will call again and again and again."

He said this and then clenched his teeth suddenly.

She sank her head, but made no answer.

"Come, Helen," he said, forcing his voice into a softer key, "you cannot seriously think that Creed has any influence over me."

"I do, papa."

"What should give him influence?"

She was silent.

"His face? Am I fascinated by that? does his genius charm me? reason with your own conjecture. Matters which lie near the surface are often converted into mysteries because the search for them is pushed too deep. In medicine your profound physician is often a fool. He gets

under a disease instead of atop of it, and that his sagacity may not be at fault, creates a malady in the room of the one he can't find. Rise to the surface, Helen, and then you will be in daylight. Creed is a companionable man—he makes knowledge grotesque by his person and interpretations—and you know I am a lover of the odd.”

“ But you do not like him, papa ?”

“ How can you tell ? Besides, admitting that I do not like him, you must know that there are certain forms of aversion which are very pleasurable. Why do I take pleasure in ugly furniture ? But I am wandering into intellectual anatomy and cannot expect you to follow me. But remember this : *θαῦρος* in Greek means either fear or wonder : we get admiration

out of wonder : and the Greeks understood the two emotions to be so akin that they made one word express them both. . . Now don't go and think that I fear Creed : I am only trying to prove to you that I may both dislike and admire him—though I deny the dislike—it is your own interpretation."

All this cloudy sophistry left Helen's conviction quite undisturbed : but she seemed to assent that she might please him.

He gazed at her steadfastly as if to read her thoughts. He was deeply suspicious of his own acting, and watched its effects with jealous terror. He seemed about to say something more, then wheeled around and walked out of the room.

CHAPTER II.

NEXT DAY.

"Oh ! altered, altered ! even the smile is gone !"

C. NORTON.

NEXT day came. Helen was with Louis all the morning, but said not a word to him about the conversation she had had with her father.

And for a good reason : she had learnt no more from it than had it never taken place.

He noticed that she was singularly dispirited and asked her what was the

matter ; but she answered evasively, being now determined to make Creed no more subject of argument between them until she could justify her suspicions by some definite preception.

She and her father had sat through the breakfast without reference to the subject that had employed them the night before ; but he had not been stern and cool to her as she had feared ; on the contrary, he had talked freely, though with a manifest effort that could not escape her.

This, however, she attributed to kindness ; perhaps he was sorry for the manner in which he had refused her, and wished to make amends.

But she was very miserable at heart : and in spite of Louis' efforts to cheer her, she returned to the Gray House with such

low spirits that when she reached her bedroom she sat down and had a good cry.

But there were no repinings against her lot : no diminution of that holy love for her father which had glowed with unquenchable fire ever since her childhood.

Her grief was roused by her inability to help him ; she knew that he was miserable : but her dim suspicion was not certain knowledge : and she could get no hint, no whisper, no intelligence however subtle, to make her sure.

In her suspicion of Creed she had her own Louis against her : and her father's lips were sealed, and she could rest her doubts on no firmer foundation than her interpretation of the riddles his face sub-

mitted, and the yet more intricate conundrum of Creed's intimacy, familiarity, and influence.

At lunch her father's manner was even kinder than it had been at breakfast : (they only met at meal-times) moreover there was an earnest and anxious watchfulness in the gaze he fixed upon her, mixed with a suggestion of speculation, as though he was studying her whilst he talked, and mentally noting points of character on which his brain commented whilst his tongue chattered trifling things.

All this she remarked with an uneasiness that troubled her ; because she felt that it ought to have begotten light and cheerful emotions.

She strolled in the grounds in the afternoon, and he joined her there and repeated

his affectionate manner with even more emphasis.

Then it was that he told her he had thought much of what she had said to him the evening before : "you know that I love you. You know that I would die for you, papa." And as he repeated these words he passed his arm around her waist and said,—

"Is your love for me so great, Helen ? would you die for me, my child ?"

"If my death would make you happy I would die for you, papa," she answered.

"But would you give Louis up for me ?"

"I love Louis," she answered tremulously, "but I love God more,

and God would wish me to do my duty."

"It would be your duty to die for your father—no, not die: I took your word—but to talk of death is mere madness. If death could expiate . . . ah! my God! that should be an easy expiation if it be tranquil—not violent, not shameful, not horrible . . . What is duty? define it for me . . . give me your sense of it."

"Oh papa, I do not understand—you frighten me."

"Frighten you . . . my little girl! my poor little girl!"

He stamped his foot and bit his lip, until the blood came.

His thoughts were maddening. He had given voice to the horror that haunted him: that violent, that shameful, that

horrible death he had spoken of, that spectre which looked at him over Creed's shoulder, which muttered and threatened him in Creed's absence, that was the thing whose shadow his involuntary words had conjured up even in the bright sunshine, and when Helen trembled, his own spirit shook and shivered within him, and he stamped his foot in his agony.

He could pursue the theme no further. He had his hope and he grasped it wildly, being a drowning man who seized the straw that floated past him. What had been threatened might not be, and the very illusion of chance brought its atom of comfort.

So presently he laughed and stooped to pick a flower, and then said, whilst

he kept his face hidden, that he could not help speaking of her love for him, but that he was foolish to frighten her.

CHAPTER III.

THE DOCTOR'S CONFESSION.

‘The young and pure are not apt to find out that miserable truth until it is brought home to them by the guiltiness of some trusted friend. They may have heard much of the evil of the world, and seem to know it, but only as an impalpable theory. In due time, some mortal, whom they reverence too highly, is commissioned by Providence to teach them this direful lesson ; he perpetrates a sin ; and Adam falls anew, and Paradise, heretofore in unfaded bloom, is lost again, and closed for ever, with the fiery swords gleaming at its gates.”—*Transformation*.

“He sat upright, and ere the dream
Had had time to depart,
O God forgive me !” he exclaimed
‘I have torn out her heart !”—COLERIDGE.

SOME days passed without bringing Creed to the house.

When the second day was come and gone, Helen felt sure there had been a quarrel between him and her father. But if this were so, what made Frasèr so anxious ?

His trouble increased upon him, the longer Creed stopped away. After dinner he would no longer linger in his study, as had been his custom, but wander restlessly from room to room, sometimes even going to the gate, and expectant and wretched beyond the power of concealment.

Creed was still in Milborough, she knew : for Louis had met him and told her how very smartly he was dressed, and with what laborious elegance he

had raised his hat and made his odd bow.

Meanwhile Dr. Fraser never left the house, save to wander in the grounds. On the fourth day he said, while they sat at dinner,—

“Will Creed come to-night, I wonder?”

“He will not come if you don’t invite him,” she answered.

“Invite him!” he exclaimed with a hollow laugh, “I would rather . . .”

He checked himself, and added,

“I have not seen him to invite him.”

“But you don’t want him, papa?”

“No, he wants me,” he answered, looking at her fixedly.

“Why?”

“Ay, there it is. That same Why, says

Martin Luther, has been the cause of much evil. Why? are there not more things in heaven and earth than are dreamt of in any man's philosophy? Do you know, Helen, that the old puppet-show of Dr. Faustus and the Devil is a very honest piece of fiction which symbols real human needs and deeds and misery? What is the recipe for obliterating blood-writing from a bond between the soul and the Evil One? An angel's tears? Oh, Helen, weep, weep! I pray to God that your tears only may suffice."

"Whatever I am to do that will suffice, shall be done," said Helen, hiding the fear his words had created, that she might humour his mood and so learn, perhaps, what she wished to know.

"Dearest girl!" he exclaimed in a voice

exquisitely tender and soft, and sighed deeply; but spoke no more for some time, and then chose another subject.

But the few words he had said determined Helen to talk to Louis, who called that evening, about him.

When the boy rang the hall bell Helen, who was sure it was he, went out to meet him; but there was her father also in the hall.

"Oh, is it you, Louis?" he said, and shook his hand languidly, and returned to the study.

"He did not seem glad to see me," Louis said to Helen when they were alone.

"He has been expecting Mr. Creed," Helen answered. "He has not been here since Tuesday. Papa will not tell

me whether they have quarrelled or not. But I am sure they have, although he is restless, and eager to see him. Oh, what is this secret, Louis? At dinner to-day, papa spoke so strangely that I was almost too frightened to answer him."

"What did he say?"

"He spoke of people who sold themselves to the Evil One, and he said, 'Weep, weep, Helen, I pray to God your tears only may suffice!'"

"If he is serious he is under some delusion: if he is not serious then we must laugh as he wishes, although his joke is not an agreeable one."

"He is serious," cried Helen; "and the Evil Spirit he means is Creed."

"What! you think he has sold himself to Creed?" Louis exclaimed with a laugh.

"Come, Helen, you know more about that unhappy man than you will confess. Own now, that you have seen his cloven feet, and that he has a pair of horns which he smooths back over his ears with his astonishing hair, but which erect themselves from time to time for your especial behoof."

"The truth will come out one of these days, Louis," answered Helen with intense gravity; "and then you will regret having laughed at me."

"But just consider, darling, the unreasonable bounds you are pushing your prejudices to. You are not satisfied with disliking Mr. Creed, you must now make him out the Arch-Fiend who has deliberately purchased your father's soul."

"No, Louis, you put it unfairly. My

meaning is that there is a secret between papa and that man, which makes papa his slave."

It was some days now since she had discussed this subject with Louis, and he had believed that she had got the better of her prejudices, and was entertaining only a rational dislike of the man; but this renewal of her ideas showed him their persistency, and in spite of himself he could not help feeling impressed by the increasing strength of her strange suspicions.

"Why not ask your father, frankly, the nature of the understanding between him and Creed?" he said.

"I have, and he will tell me nothing."

"That would convince *me* there is nothing to tell."

“In spite of his altered looks and the strange things he says?”

“Well, dearest, if there is a secret, depend upon it it is commonplace, and when you know it you will think lightly of it, and wonder at the stress your father has laid upon it. You see you are in the dark, and darkness generates all sorts of delusions. Be sure of one thing—that whatever this secret is, it cannot be wicked, so far as your father is concerned. Remember his behaviour to my mother, the honourable reputation he left behind him in his profession. The only charge that can be brought against him is that he is exclusive and inhospitable. But I know differently: he is neither one nor the other, but looks on society as a toy of which he has outlived the pleasure it affords.”

Just then the hall bell rang.

"There is Mr. Creed now!" cried Helen, and ran to the door and listened.

But she could hear nothing.

After an interval of a few moments the servant came in.

"A boy has brought this letter for master," said she.

"Papa is in the study," answered Helen.

The servant withdrew.

This interruption gave Louis an excuse for changing the conversation. He did not much relish this subject of Creed, which he not only found tiresome but injurious, and excited Helen, and took her thoughts away from matters he loved to talk to her about. She humoured him, and was listening with her sweet face up-

turned to his, as she sat by his side, when Dr. Fraser opened the door.

His white face showed for a moment, and he mumbled something about forgetting that Louis was there, and was gone again.

His presence and departure were as those of an apparition, and the deceit was well helped by his ghostly pallor.

“What did he say?” whispered Helen.

“Why, I think it was a hint for me to be gone,” answered Louis. “He evidently wanted to speak to you alone.”

“Oh, Louis!” exclaimed Helen, not offering to detain him, “what is going to happen?”

He felt her tremble, and answered—

“My darling, what do you fear? Your suspicions and doubts have made you

nervous. Have courage. If there is anything wrong, your father will want your help, and you must support him, and do your duty as his child."

But as he said this a misgiving, that might have resembled her own in its influence, came over him.

He had certainly been startled by the doctor's spectral-looking face at the door; but then he did not think as she did, but that his mind was unhinged, that study had unsettled his reason; and, quick as thought always is, his fancy established the understanding between the two men on these grounds—Creed knew that the doctor was losing his mind, and was tending him subtly, that Helen should have no suspicion.

A strange idea! but really well-warranted.

He said nothing about this fancy of his to Helen, but kissed her, and was going ; but she held him, not asking him to stop, but unconsciously acting as her instincts dictated, which was to cling to him, though her thoughts were elsewhere.

“ Why, dearest, I must go,” he said ; “ for your father wants you, and my mother wants me. But the time is coming when no living need shall separate us—eh, my Helen ? Come, kiss me. God bless thee !”

And he drew her to him and strained her to his heart, and then went away, looking at her over his shoulder, and standing at the door to blow her a kiss with both hands.

He closed the hall-door smartly behind him, to let Fraser know he was gone ;

which hint availed, for in a minute or two Fraser came out of his study, and walked quickly into the dining-room.

“Helen! Helen!” he called, in a low voice, as one in the pains of death, and leaned heavily upon the table.

She looked at him, standing where Louis had left her, near the foot of the sofa, at some distance from her.

“Come to me, Helen!” he moaned. “Let me touch you, lean upon you. The blow is struck, Helen! Oh, my God, pity me—pity us!”

She flew to his side, deadly pale, but resolute.

“What is it, papa? Tell me quickly—what is it?”

He drew out his handkerchief, and wiped his mouth, and then went round the table

to the arm-chair he usually occupied, but did not seat himself.

She followed him, and looked with a little frown of wild anxiety in his face.

“Oh, Helen, the time is come!—I may conceal myself no longer from you. Oh my child, I am a ruined man . . . I am heart-broken . . .”

He flung his arms around her neck, and sobbed.

She held herself erect under his weight, though his convulsions wrung her delicate frame, and threatened to crush her under the moral as well as the physical weight they imposed.

“Give me strength, O God! be with me now!” she murmured, straining her eyes upwards, and then she laid her soft lips to her father’s cheek, and spoke not until his

passion of grief was in a measure spent.

He raised himself presently, and sank wearily into a chair, and hid his face, and so, with his face hidden, he groaned out,—

“Helen, listen to me—I killed Horace Lenden! His blood is on my head!”

She heard what her mind could not at first receive; and when in a moment or two she comprehended his meaning, she thought he was delirious and babbled a horrible lie.

“Papa, papa, what are you saying? think again. This is some dreadful dream you have had.”

He raised his head.

“Dream! would to God it were! Oh, Helen! the night that boy was missed he came to me and called me wicked names,

and drove me mad with anger. I clenched my fist in my fury, and struck him, and he fell down and died. And when he was dead—Oh, Helen! oh, my poor child!—Creed came in, and found me stooping over the body, and he told me I should be charged with the murder. There was a terrible storm, and the thunder drove me crazy. And Creed said that the body must be hidden, and controlled me with fear, and helped me to carry it to the river. And from that moment,” he shrieked, the blood rushing into his head with a fit of wild fury, “the wretch has never left me, but has lived upon me, and taken my money, throwing out threats all the while that if I balked him he would charge me with the murder, and now it has come to this!”

He tore a letter from his side-pocket, and struck it like a madman with his fist.

Helen was speechless ; her face so colourless, that in death it could not look whiter ; her arms were partly raised, her fingers distended ; and thus she stood, as if she had been turned into marble in the act of warding off some horrible danger.

"Helen," he cried, leaning forward and grasping her hands, "do you think I killed that boy intentionally ? I swear by your mother—I swear by your own precious heart—that he died by an accident. I am as innocent of his death as I should be of yours were you to drop dead at my feet now because I tell you this story. Oh, Helen, believe me !"

"I do !" she gasped ; and she drew her

hands away to press them to her heart, for she felt as if she were being suffocated.

“Think,” he continued, “of what I have suffered ! Day and night since that cruel thing befel me, I have been haunted by that dead boy. He has sat with me in the study, and followed me to my bed, and has kept me sleepless with his dead face and dumb threats. And not only him . . . Oh, God ! has not Creed avenged him ! That man, Helen, has taken money as the price of his silence, and I have been his abject slave, and still am ; and have cringed to him and cowered before him, because he knows—he knows—that which—that thing which his accursed evidence would—Oh, my child ! he calls me murderer ! He will not believe that I did not mean to kill the boy ; he *will* not, be-

cause he can live upon my secret—it is his fortune, his pride. O wretched cruel villain !”

He ground his teeth, and gave a quick deep sob.

By this time the sense of life had returned to Helen : and now the horror of the secret that had been told her was qualified—subdued, nay, put on one side by knowledge of the unutterable suffering her father had endured.

She felt that if she could but weep, she would be the stronger for her tears ; but her tears would not flow.

Her father resumed,—

“ Until now, I have never dared to speak of this thing to you. My secret has been my own ; but what has my loneliness entailed ? Oh, the feeling of desolation

that has come over me when I have met your clear eyes, and seen you smile, and heard you prattle of things from which I am as alienated as if I were in my grave! I had hoped to bribe Creed into silence until my death; and I hoped—I hoped my heart would break and release me from him. Then you could have defied him. Then he would have been powerless. But he makes another claim upon me now—the last, the worst—and because I cursed him for his audacity, he left the house, refusing to see me until I made the concession he demanded. And I, like a fool, hoped that he would not press me further, but be satisfied with money. Now he has sent me this.”

He opened the letter he held, and read—

"SIR,

"I HAD expected a definite answer from you before this. I waive your insults as matters of too little moment to be heeded in a consideration of our mutual interests.

"Still, I submit to their influence so far as they dictate a practical and summary course, though it is as disagreeable to me to threaten it as it will be for you to earn it.

"I am patient, and can wait a week ; but after that time, your silence will be interpreted by me as indifference to your fate, which I shall therefore have the less compunction to hasten.

"Yours obediently,

"J. CREED."

"Do you know what that means?" he shrieked, brandishing the letter. "That if I do not let him marry you, he will accuse me of the murder of Horace Lenden!"

"Marry me!" said Helen, in a stupefied whisper.

"Yes, yes! *that* is his last demand. Your hand—*yours*, Helen—he loves you—he raves about you!"

Her head slightly dropped, otherwise she showed no signs of life.

He had believed she would faint when he told her this; but she remained standing unsupported.

He looked at her face, and then put out his hand.

The moment he touched her, she fell on her knees by his side.

"Papa, papa!"

"My own child! my poor girl!"

"Papa, I will die for you—but not *this!*"

She shuddered violently.

"Oh God! can *I* not die?" he cried.

"Marry *him* . . ." she stopped, and whispered, "and if I do not?"

"He threatens me! he will denounce me! And oh! the ignominy, the awful ignominy! for don't you see that I hid the body, and they would say, 'He murdered him, or he would not have concealed his crime!' And there is no living being to prove my innocence; and, thanks to that miscreant, there is not an act of mine but would tell against and convict me of having murdered the boy. Oh, hear me!" he cried, writhing in his anguish. "He has

me in his power, and I cannot escape. I dared not leave the country, for that would have proved my guilt. I dared not speak after I had helped him to hide the body, for they would call it remorse, not innocence. I dared not pass a day without seeing him, lest my neglect should anger him, for he holds my life on the tip of his tongue : a cautious villain, who knows that his own punishment would be slight—if, indeed, he were punished, at all. Do you understand my awful position ? And only you can save me now. Think of it ! Can you judge how I have been tempted ? Does *he* guess ? As there is a God in heaven ! have I sat with him with the real murderer's thoughts in my brain, frenzying me. One deeper degree of hate—one crueller taunt, one more merciless threat at

such a moment, and I should have killed him !”

She jumped up with a cry.

“ Oh, no ! oh, no ! unsay those words . . . don't tell me that !”

“ But to be goaded as I have been . . . to know that my life, my honour—*your* honour, my honourable reputation, were at the mercy of this man. Judge me mercifully ; *He* knows the truth about that deed of mine. *He* knows, as you do, as my Maker does, that I did not mean the death of the boy. And now the very darkest time of all is come ! If you will not save me——”

She clasped her hands behind, and looking down answered,—

“ Papa, I will save you.”

“ How ! you will marry him ?”

"I will do my duty to *you*."

"Oh Helen!"

He could say no more.

A thousand thoughts rushed upon him and a more overwhelming sense of degradation and misery than he had ever known, seemed to bear him with its weight to the ground.

This was the girl who had longed for his love, whom he had kept at a cold distance from his heart! This was the girl, now sublimely baring her breast to receive the death-blow that was aimed at him, from whom he had withheld his sympathies, whom he had seen lonely without heeding her, who had lost a mother's devotion and had crept to his side for his love to replace it and had been refused, but without loss of her own

true faith in him, of her own holy admiration, of her own wonderful tenacity of affection that clung to the rock of his nature and made it fragrant and beautiful with flowers and sweet perfumes!

This was the girl in whose eyes a kind word from him was sufficient to kindle the fires of happiness and pride, and he had grudged her kind words: who, with an unbounded longing for affection and with a nature so deep that all his love, had he given it to her, would not have filled it, had ever, without his love, preserved her perfect sweetness, her tenderness, her uncomplaining amiability.

She had admired and revered him!
What would she think now!

His hand was red with blood! his face

was seamed with the furrows and scars of a stricken conscience.

He threw himself upon the table and, burying his face in his arms, cried like a child.

There are few sights more moving than a strong man in tears ; there could be no sight more piteous to Helen than her own father's wild abandonment to grief.

Had he been indeed a murderer, yet as surely as her heart was a pure, a womanly, a merciful heart, would she have forgiven him, would she have clung to him only the more fondly, would she have wept for him and asked God to put it into her heart so to help him that her own happiness, her own very life, might be as nothing beside the needs of his.

He felt her hands about his neck, he

heard her voice in his ears, and he knew that she was offering herself as a sacrifice for him.

His tears relieved him, and even as he sat with his face buried and his powerful form convulsed with sobs, he was sensible that his load had become the lighter by imparting it, that his secret was no longer the dead and heart-breaking weight it had been through the horrible, weary, lonely weeks he had borne it.

"Helen," he said looking up, "tell me that you believe me innocent!"

"I do, papa. He angered you and you struck him, and the poor boy died."

That was it, but he shuddered to hear her tell of this thing.

Terror was coming uppermost again.

He seized her hand passionately and cried,—

“ You must not tell Louis.”

“ Oh papa !”

“ No, no !” he cried wildly. “ It must be our secret. There are three who know it now—would to God it were known to us two only. It would be safe in no other living creature’s keeping.”

“ But Louis may be trusted for my sake.”

“ No !” he shouted. “ He is the brother. Not for worlds . . it would drive me mad !”

His wish had always been her law, and she was silent ; but the full force of her misery had not been felt until she understood that she was to have a secret which she must not share with Louis.

Scarcely yet, perhaps, although in thought and word she had dedicated herself to her father, did she comprehend the full extent of the obligation his deed imposed on her.

She acted in a dream, in which both the threat and the demand of Creed were a kind of illusion which the mind rejected, and still clung to its familiar facts.

But when, presently, he spoke to her of Louis, and with supplication and despair in his voice, asked her if she would sacrifice her lover for him, and save him from infamy by the gift of her hand to Creed, then the truth took shape in her mind and she uttered a low sharp cry of pain.

“Let me have to-night,” she moaned.

"Give me time . . I have not strength. I want courage—I must pray."

"Oh my beloved Helen, what am I asking you to do for me?" he cried. "Can you do this? is it possible? It will kill you! Look at me—am I not the most miserable of men? I have to choose between my only child's happiness, and God alone knows what frightful and ignominious penalty. My brain must go—it must destroy me!"

He clutched his temples with his hands.

"Is there *no* escape, papa? *must* this be?"

"Dearest, I have thought of escape. Night after night I have lain awake planning and vowing to execute my plans. But if I left Milborough, Creed would

follow me. If he could not find me he would inform against me. Do you know that he is a fiend? No deliberate threat except the one he has written in this letter has ever fallen from him, but he has implied his resolution more strongly than had he spoken it. That night, when he asked me to give you to him, I cursed him and would have struck him, but my hand was restrained by the memory of the horror it had already brought upon me. Then I humbled myself, I wept, and entreated him to forbear this demand. I told him that you were in love with Louis, and that I could not take you from your love without breaking your heart. He laughed at me, but I still pleaded and I told him I would give him the half of my fortune if he would release and leave me

and see me no more. But would he take the half when he wants the whole? He wants you—he wants all that I have : and when he made me understand this, my fury broke out and he left the house. And now what remedy is there? I know none. None!”

But as he said this a change came over his face; he looked steadily at her, and then whispered something to himself.

Meanwhile she remained standing with her eyes fixed on the ground. Her face was quite expressionless, her eyes vacant. In fact, despair had numbed her.

When her father owned that he was helpless then indeed she knew that he was so : for she had always looked up to him as one gifted with great power of judg-

ment, resolute and clever, and she submitted to the sense of hopelessness he inspired, as life would have been quickened in her had he spoken of escape.

It was, indeed, one of those frightful dilemmas which are so scarce in the story of human life that they barely fall within the sphere of the probable.

She could not look at her father, for the sight of his misery,—made infinitely pitiable by the need it involved of stooping the nature she knew to be proud to a demand upon her sympathy, her help, the sacrifice of her love and life indeed; stooping, a maimed and stricken man who had hitherto reigned, in her fancy, alone in regions she beheld with reverence from afar, to *her*, the weak, the simple girl—

bruised her spirit so that the pain was more than she could bear; but neither could she think of Louis, for here was suffering as acute, and she blinded herself to it as something to which she was being helplessly driven, and which she dared not look at.

Those were moments unspeakable.

"Papa," she said softly, "let me leave you. I must be alone. I will tell you all to-morrow."

"Kiss me, Helen."

She went to him and he took her in his arms.

"Darling child," he said, "I have not been a kind father to you. You have wanted my love, and although I have known your want, my selfishness has never heeded it. But a father's blessing

may avail although he is a bad man, for God will know how good was the heart that provoked the blessing of a cold and selfish man. Bless her, O Father!" he cried, looking up, "for her own sake; bless her for the sake of her sainted mother. Be with her and near her in this her hour of suffering; help her to bear the weight of the sorrow that has come upon her through me, of the deeper sorrow that has yet to come!"

He paused and kissed her gently.

"Good night, my blessed child," he said.

"To-morrow, papa . . ."

"To-morrow, yes. Go now. Do not cry too bitterly. Weep for me—not for yourself. The gloom, the midnight, is

mine, not yours. The light is breaking for you—but for me . . .”

He took her hand, kissed it, and let it fall.

“Good night,” he said.

. . .

CHAPTER IV.

FATHER AND CHILD.

“ To be thus—

Grey-hair'd with anguish, like those blasted pines
Wrecks of a single winter, barkless, branchless,
A blighted trunk upon a cursed root,
Which but supplies a feeling to decay,—
And to be thus, eternally but thus,
Having been otherwise ! Not furrow'd o'er
With wrinkles, plough'd by moments, not by years
And hours—all tortur'd into ages—hours
Which I outlive !”—*Manfred*.

HELEN went to her bedroom, stunned by what she had heard, and not so heeding as to gather any strong meaning from them the last words her father had spoken to her.

She locked her door, though there was no need to do that, but she was governed by her instincts, and acted as if her danger had a material presence, and could be shut out by locks and bolts.

She went to the window and drew aside the curtains, courting the peace and fellowship of the stars, and then her thoughts went to work and amazement and anguish filled her.

And *this* was the secret then that had been shadowed in her father's manner, and in his intimacy with Creed.

Had he really killed Horace Lenden?

It seemed impossible.

Whatever doubts had been bred in her, *that* idea had never been among them.

In her own mind she had been always sure that the boy was drowned by falling

into the river ; and this was a familiar idea, and it appeared an achievement beyond the power of conviction to transform it into the deadly and awful shape it claimed to wear.

But when the horror was greatest in her heart it would suddenly be dissolved by pity, when she thought of her father's sufferings.

Next to himself she could understand them best, for she knew how great his pride was, how morbid his sensitiveness, and felt as if she herself had experienced the pain, the quick and poignant torture these qualities would inflict as he stooped to Creed and smiled on him, and bowed, and hung like a drivelling parasite on his words, and watched his least gesture, and lay in waiting for his lightest remark, all

the while abhorring him as the ruffian whose lips were upon his wound, and sucking his life-blood through the gash a momentary passion had inflicted.

And to save her father from—what? A sick shudder passed through her as she thought—what?—to save her father she would have to give the man who had hunted him down her hand!

No, no! that could not be true. Some fear had whispered that. But her father had said so. Ay, truly—and to leave Louis—she shook her head and closed her eyes as if she felt her consciousness leaving her.

She took some toilet vinegar and bathed her damp forehead, and the pungent liquor revived her.

Let her now think steadily.

First of Louis : and what was to be thought ?

To save her father she must leave him, and she must not tell him why she forsook him, for her father would not have his secret known ; but if that secret *were* told to Louis, what then ?

Would it separate them ?

Why surely it would : for he was high-minded, for ever seeking out means to render homage to his Maker, easily shocked and repelled by wrong, and though he might mourn her, though he might shed bitter tears for her, would he marry the daughter of the man who killed his brother ?

Now may a pitying heaven send this poor little heart strength to sustain her agony, and so to think her awful problem

out that its solution shall leave her spirit pure as the starlight that shines upon her.

This was a paramount thought for the time ; she could think of nothing else.

Sometimes a weary sigh broke from her, sometimes a shiver passed over her, for this was the newest aspect of her father's guilt, and not until now had she considered that it would sever her from Louis more effectually than were the grave between them.

To whom in this moment of supreme desolation could she turn ?

She was upon her knees even as the question rose from her heart, and pouring forth a wild and broken prayer to God for courage and counsel.

Presently this was ended, and she rose

calm and thoughtful. The cup of bitterness had not been taken from her ; but the draught had been sweetened by a resolution that surely awoke a glad music among her sisters, the angels, who watched her from the heavens.

Her father must be first—before all things, first : before her love, before her dread, before her misery, first.

He had given her her life, and she must do her duty mindless of what it entailed.

No ! of what it entailed she could not, she must not think.

She thrust the thoughts from her. They were the tempter's whispers teaching her desertion. She must keep one image in her mind—that of Him who died for all, even for those who loved Him not.

Was not His sacrifice greater than

hers? To imitate, to follow Him, she must abandon all things.

“He that taketh not his cross and followeth after Me is not worthy of Me.”

She seemed to read those words upon the sky. She looked upwards, extending her hands. She felt Him near her. She remembered His promises and was soothed and wept.

Meanwhile Dr. Fraser lingered in the dining-room.

After his daughter had left he remained for many minutes so still that you would have thought him a sleeping man.

A dark and sinful thought that had long lurked like a dark shadow in a corner of his mind, had been summoned forth on a sudden, and he was now contemplating it.

Sometimes it made him draw his breath

with difficulty, and the perspiration would stand in beads upon his forehead : sometimes it brought forth a smile which so closely resembled a scowl that it is beyond imagination to conceive the nature of the thoughts that could produce an expression so mingled.

At last he left his chair and went to the window.

The movement resolved the chaotic elements of his mind into defined perceptions, and he fell to pacing to and fro, thinking as he walked with clearness and precision.

Indeed, he was now in one of those highly-wrought moods which refine not only the physical but the intellectual sensations : when life makes herself felt keenly at her most secret sources, and when the

thoughts seem on fire and throw an illumination on the innermost mysteries of the moral organization.

The actions of which such a mood is the almost invariable prelude, are readily suspected by the psychologist. We, the sober coroners of such sublimated conditions of moral and physical being, may well term them madness: for they are a species of intoxication, whether born of such despair as impels the suicide, or the enthusiasm that inspires the martyr, with which we can have no sympathy, and which needs the genius of the creator of Hamlet to interpret.

He looked around him for an avenue of escape and found none; and every outlet being closed, there was but one hiding-place.

He could not fear it, for his mood was one of supreme audacity.

If life for a moment pleaded against it, there were iron tongues to silence her : pride, fury, misery, and Helen's love, which raised a voice that sounded high above all the rest.

What was life to him now ?

It was branded and sentenced by the sternest tribunal that presides over man's actions, and so was accurst, and not worth the holding, even if the penalties that were attached to his deed were taken away from him.

True, he had killed the boy innocently ; but had this act terminated with itself, had all the obligations of secresy, had all the threats and the haunting presence of Creed been removed, his morbid sensi-

bility would still have suffered torments from memory, and with the boy's blood upon his head he would never more have known peace of mind.

If conscience had been inactive in respect of his guilt, it was only because he had been overwhelmed with the immediate and pressing fear of discovery, to the evasion of which he had devoted all his faculties, so that it had become the great absorbing consideration of his life.

But now he was thinking of Helen, and his imagination rendered extraordinarily active by the delirium of his mood, figured her future and his own, if he suffered it to come.

What excuse had she for breaking with Louis?

And that set aside, for there was no

answer to it, whilst on the other hand it was a reflection that promised questions, doubts, misgivings, suspicions, which might lead to detection after all, he had next to think of her as Creed's wife.

As Creed's wife !

Oh the horrible irony of it !

As the wife of the man who had brought him to *this*, of the villain who had created the ills he fed on, who had haunted and plundered him and now, with his pockets filled with the price of his silence, was demanding with cold deliberate menace, Helen's hand !

It could not be.

That which he had thought at first, he thought now in the revulsion of feeling that had been wrought by his daughter's noble love : that the gallows for himself .

were preferable to such a fate for his child.

Only he had hoped that the man would not push his demand to that last extremity, and on receiving his letter had acted on an impulse rather than with the wish that such a doom should fall upon Helen through him, when he opened his heart to her and asked her to save him.

And she had consented to save him : had torn her love—the love of many long months—from her heart at his request, and had flung herself prostrate under the iron wheels of his fate to rescue him from shame and death !

Could this be *his* child who had acted thus ?

His heart was cold, his nature selfish, he was a sceptic and doubted human good-

ness, had shunned society through conceit of his own superior powers, had raised with his own hand a barrier between himself and his fellow-creatures, and so shut out his sympathies from perception of the human needs, the griefs and the joys, the laughter and the tears, which no man can shut his eyes to and be true.

Not from him then could Helen have drawn the moral life which was so beautiful and holy that humanity was all the richer for her lightest smile.

He thought of his dead wife and beheld her with his mind's eye ; and the love that he believed was buried with her in her grave gushed forth again, and gave a softness to his mood that was scarcely less ominous than when it was strained to the last limit of tension.

She was before him, his poor wife, and she held their little child upon her knee, and he saw her bending over the infant with looks of deepest love; for this was an image memory had preserved as one of the sweetest pictures of his married life.

And he recalled his wife's devotion to the little babe, and how she had nursed it through its illnesses, and how, as it grew, she watched it with a love that included naught else but him and the little one, and then he bethought him how, when she was dying, and smiling to make him believe that she was not in pain, though he knew that the pain tortured her, she had whispered to him to love Helen for her sake, which grieved him as a rebuke because it implied her knowledge of his

want of affection for the child's sake, and he had answered that he would love her.

How had he kept that promise ?

So badly that he dared not think of it. But still he might redeem that death-bed promise which, were it broken now in this his poor child's terrible extremity, *must* be transformed into a curse to add a deadlier sting than any to the conscience within him.

And as he spoke these words, almost aloud, he walked suddenly out of the dining-room and entered the study.

CHAPTER V.

TWO LETTERS.

"Last cometh on the night—the hot bad night,
With less of all—of heat, of dust, of light ;
And leaves him watching with a helpless stare,—
The theme of no one's hope and no one's care.

* * * * *

His thoughts dark chaos takes some certain form,
And he begins to pine for joys long lost,
Or hopes unrealiz'd ;—till bruised and tost
He sends his soul vain journeys through the gloom
For radiant eyes that should have wept his doom."

CAROLINE NORTON.

THE room was lighted up, as he had left it. His armchair was near the table, and there was a book he had been read-

ing when Creed's letter was given to him.

He seated himself at the table and began to write ; but his mind continually wandered, and he found himself with his pen unmoving and his eyes about the room, taking in his books, his engravings, his curiosities.

He sighed and then forced his will to obey him, and soon he wrote quickly and freely.

When the letter was finished he read it through, and this was how it ran :—

“ MY DARLING HELEN,

“ When you read this I shall be out of the reach of the cruel miscreant who has broken my heart, and you will be safe.

“No other thought than that could give me comfort now. Why should you make the sacrifice you offer ?

“You are young in years, and life is before you, and God knows, my Helen, you have had little pleasure in the years you have lived, and so now deserve a future of happiness which you will obtain ; for the only thing that makes happiness you have : a just and faithful heart.

“But I have lived and in a double sense, for I have been a selfish man and cared only for my enjoyments ; and though the world may not call me old, I am old and weary too, dear Helen ; for I have had to bear a burden under which life has staggered, and now that burden is to be doubled ; so I must let it fall.

“As I hope for your happiness, my

child, as I loved your mother, I swear that the death of Horace Lenden was an accident.

“ I would not say this *now* if it were not true.

“ He came to me on that fatal night and I brought him into the study, believing that he wished to excuse himself for his conduct ; but no sooner was the door closed, than he told me I was a rascal for allowing Louis to make love to you, and when he saw my passion, he sneered at me and said the whole town hated and despised me. I told him to leave me, jumping up as I spoke, meaning to take him by the collar and thrust him out of the house. And would to God I had done that and no more ! but he guessed my intention and backed up against the fireplace, using the

senseless word he had applied to me in the morning.

“My passion was so great that I seemed blind and on fire ; and I leaped forwards and struck him upon the ear. He fell back like a statue.

“My rage left me when he did not move, and I knelt by him to see if he lived.

“When my anguish was greatest, I looked around and saw Creed watching me, and I said, ‘ Good God, I have murdered him !’

“ These were the fatal words, and in one sense they were true ; but not in the sense Creed took them. They were wrung from me by the sight of a human witness, and were an exclamation I would have made had I ridden the boy down by accident, or

killed him in any innocent or involuntary way. •

“Creed offered to help me to hide the body. He worked upon my terror by representing that the insult I had received that morning would supply a *motive* for the commission of murder ; that he, and you, and Louis, knew of that insult ; that I was disliked at Milborough, and would have all the town against me ; that no one was present when I struck the blow, and that, therefore, I could not bring forward any proof, beyond my own bare assertion, that the boy’s death was the result of an accident.

“I was unnerved by the storm and by the thought of having taken a human life, and listened to him eagerly. He controlled me, and I helped him to carry the body to

the river ; and from that moment I was practically a murderer, and in Creed's power, as he intended I should be, and have never known a moment's peace since that night.

“ He has had large sums of money from me, and my fears were ever being increased by his careless behaviour ; for he was a beggar I had put on horseback, and the novelty of money to him was inducing a conduct that threatened to jeopardise my life.

“ Well, I need not go on, for you know the rest ; and I swear that this story is true. It is too late to lament. I could have acted otherwise with him ; I did not, and so I have suffered.

“ And now God bless thee, Helen. It tranquillises me to know that you will have

a loving and a faithful heart to lean on. Keep my secret for your own sake. Louis will help you. Creed is powerless now, even as you read this letter ; but should he persist in his threats—and he may think you will still pay money to preserve my reputation—let Louis deal with him resolutely. He will know how.

“ I leave you to Louis, and trust to the mercy of God to forgive me the misery I have caused.

“ THY FATHER.”

He enclosed this letter in a blank envelope, and then wrote the following words on a slip of paper :—

“ DEAR LOUIS,

“ The enclosed must be read by you to Helen. You must be near her to com-

fort her ; and when you have read the letter destroy it, for the secret it contains should be preserved for her sake. Should I address it to her, she might faint on gathering its meaning, and then the letter would be found and read, and the whole town would be talking of me and her. You understand me. I commit my darling child to your keeping. Love her the more for remembering that she has never known my love ; and I curse my selfishness as I own it.

“ ERSKINE FRASER.”

This slip he enclosed, together with the other letter, in an envelope, and addressed it to Louis Haddon.

Having done this, he sunk his head upon his hand and fell into deep thought.

He had formed a resolution the hardest in the world to fulfil ; and now that he had done with his writing, he scarcely dared to think, lest he should unman himself.

Something of the delirium of his mind had passed away with the effort of writing; he was calmer now, and could take views that did not become exaggerated into extravagant phases of thought by the fine frenzy that had so far possessed him.

It was horrible to die ; but then if life could not be held on his own conditions, there was no alternative.

The moon shone clearly above the great black trees in the grounds, and he looked at it wistfully, and with a moment's transport in his eyes, for its light had inspired an influx of hurrying tender memories ; but

he turned his face from it soon, fearing the enchaining sweetness of the recollections it evoked, and fixed his eyes on the ground.

Life was active within him, and he must silence her.

His destiny was too strong for him—he could not escape it.

The restless dream of flight could no longer prompt. Where could he hide himself? If Creed set in motion the arm of the law, it was long enough to reach him, let him fly whithersoever he would. Retaken and charged, his flight would but concentrate the evidence against him.

And suppose him an exile, dreading all men lest they should be of those delegated to hunt him down ; distant from England,

and all the interests his sympathies created there ; all his resources closed in his mind by the passionate apprehension of his fate, and the memory of the deed that had brought him to that pass. Why, the contemplation was more intolerable than a hundred deaths ! for the death he meditated would be speedy and unsuspected ; but the life he dreamt of would be a prolonged torture.

Indeed, he was a broken-hearted man, and there was no hope for him.

He gazed around the room, upon his well-loved books, whose leaves had grown blank to him ; upon the unseemly objects he had heaped about him, each charged with a memory of desire, of keen contest, and doubtful triumph. He went to the cabinet and took his manuscript from it,

and turned its pages over, looking on them with stony eyes, then let it fall, and ground it under his heel with a spasm of fury.

But this passed, for his mind was debilitated by suffering, and emotion could not long hold its own upon the slackened nerves.

His eyes lighted on the skull, and then his mood changed.

He took it up and looked at it under the light, and moralised crazily.

There had been brains in the thing once : had they throbbed and boiled as his had ?

See those eyes and that mouth ! The underjaw had fallen, and the thing seemed to yawn in very weariness of the senseless merriment its grin obliged it to sustain.

Where was the soul that had inhabited that gaping sepulchre of bone? If it would come to him now, and tell the secrets it knew! He was about setting forth upon that search. But suppose all mere darkness? Why, then the repose would be the deeper. But there was no repose; there was life beyond—an ethereal life, that left its bones behind it; and he held now the symbol of mortal life, and he closed his eyes, with an effort of intense self-consciousness, to realise the spiritual. But he could not do that; for his heart throbbed, and his head ached, and his limbs were weak and weary, and the secret intimations he bent his mental ear to catch were confused with the pulsations of his physical being, so that they seemed one and the same.

He replaced the skull, and, lighting a candle, extinguished the gas, and went slowly upstairs to his bed-room.

CHAPTER VI.

HELEN'S RESOLUTION.

"THE want of duty on one part justifies not the non-performance of it on the other, where there is a reciprocal duty. There can be no merit, strictly speaking, in performing a duty ; but the performance of it on one side when it is not performed on the other, gives something so like a merit, that I am ready almost to worship the good mind that can do it."—RICHARDSON'S LETTERS.

"All is best, though we oft doubt
What the unsearchable dispose
Of Highest Wisdom brings about,
And ever best found in the close ;
Oft He seems to hide His face,
But unexpectedly returns."—MILTON.

THE birds were twittering in the early

morning light before Helen fell asleep, and even then her slumbers were broken by her haunting and poignant memories ; so that she scarcely enjoyed more repose than had she lain awake all night.

It was eight o'clock when she opened her eyes after her brief sleep. The room was full of light from the sun that shone upon the window, and as she looked round she could scarcely conceive that the revelation of the previous evening was not a dream.

But her heart was heavy with a weight no dream could explain ; and then, as memory grew unerring and conviction came to her, she uttered a cry of pain, and closed her eyes.

Indeed, her trouble was frightful to bear in this the early morning, when the day

was beginning, and all the long living hours stretched before her. The sun gave to all things a reality which was missed in the darkness, and so the truth seemed to take a sharper edge and become more deadly.

And then, again, the enthusiasm of the resolution that had sustained her the night before, the passionate, martyr-like sense of duty that had buoyed her up on the troubled waters of her deep affliction, was in a measure wearied by the tedious passage of the night.

She hid her face in the pillow, and wished she might die ; for the mere need of rising and going about her daily occupations, brought with it a more cruel feeling of desolation than words can tell.

The happiest of her dreams recurred to her to bewilder and torment her with

the contrast of their illusiveness with the reality of the present time.

Was it possible that she was called upon to surrender her love and the happy interests and hopes that had circled about it?

She thought of Creed and an ungovernable loathing seized her. Anything but *that*, any suffering, any sacrifice, any death but marriage with *him*.

It *never* could be!

Oh, she would do her duty to her father to this limit: she would help him to deceive Creed; yes, she would break with Louis and cling only to her father to save him from Creed; but she would kill herself rather than marry that wicked man!

Why could they not leave England? They could escape so stealthily that no

living creature should know they were gone. She would speak to her father, and, if she could but influence him, would set her brain to work and effect his salvation by cunning and stratagem. And even if her father were taken, would they make him suffer for an innocent wrong ?

If *she* was as sure as that there was a sun in heaven that her father was innocent of this crime of murder—that he had been angered and maddened, and struck the blow in passion, not meaning death but chastisement, why should not others believe him ?

Her mind, largely straining in a contrary direction, could not gather together all those details of circumstantial evidence which had rooted her father in his home, subjected him to Creed and made him

witness the frightful odds there were against his chance of acquittal.

Neither could she appreciate the terror that took him when he thought of his arraignment, even though his innocence should be established—the publicity of his shame—the close and narrow questioning that would leave its smear upon his reputation although the verdict were in his favour.

This she could not comprehend, ignorant as she was of this final phase of his deed, and omitted it therefore while she rehearsed the arguments she would use to exhort him to fly.

She left her bed presently and began to dress herself,

Looking in the toilet glass she perceived the reflection of a white object lying near

the door, and turning, she saw a letter upon the carpet which had evidently been pushed into her room under the door.

She took it and found it addressed to Louis Haddon.

She thought she could tell what this letter contained; her father had himself written to her lover to break off the engagement and had left it to her to send to Louis that she might know his resolution was taken, and save her the misery of writing or speaking.

For the first time in her life her heart raised a cry against her father. She rebelled. This letter was her sentence: it meant that she should break with Louis in order to marry Creed.

It was a piece of dreadful cruelty that he should exact to the last pang, the

sacrifice she had been prepared to make for him.

But soon she controlled herself, and then she fell on her knees and besought God to give her strength to do her duty even until her heart should break under the demands made upon it.

She would send this letter to Louis, and he would come to her, and appeal to her to be true to him, and it would be a more awful trial than her heart could then imagine, when he asked her why her father withdrew his sanction and why she justified his heartless conduct, because she would not be able to answer him.

He would leave her, with doubts of the goodness and honesty of the nature he had loved.

And even this God might enable her

to bear : but though the deed should cancel all her claims upon Divine Mercy, ay, though it even shut her out from the heaven of her prayers and her faith, yet she would kill herself rather than marry Creed.

And as she took this resolution, an expression came into her face which seemed to expose a transformation in her whole moral nature.

As she left her bed-room, she noticed that the door of her father's room was closed, whence she concluded that he still slept.

There was a hardness in her mood that took her thoughts away from him ; all her instincts told her she was doing more for him than the holiest claim upon her love should have exacted ; and despite her prayers there was so much misery and

rebellion in her heart, that she felt that when her sacrifice was consummated and her lover torn from her, she could never have the same love for her father she had hitherto borne, the same admiration and reverence that had made an idol of him in her earthly creed.

She rang the bell and gave the letter to a servant, telling her to take it to Mr. Haddon straightway, and that there was no answer to wait for.

The servant asked her if she should tell the others to bring her breakfast?

No, she needed no breakfast.

When the servant had gone she went into the drawing-room, like a wounded thing in search of a place to die in.

The curtains were drawn and the light obscure.

She crept into a corner where the room was darkest, and there seated herself, waiting for she knew not what, quite tearless, and with a despair that touched the limits of apathy.

CHAPTER VII.

LOUIS RECEIVES THE LETTER.

“Oh, what was love made for, if 'tis not the same
Through joy and through torment, through glory
and shame?”—MOORE.

FOR the first time Louis, as has been already said, had left Helen with the belief that there was really some ground for the vague suspicions she entertained respecting the change in her father, and Creed's influence over him.

He had quitted the Gray House under the impression that Dr. Fraser wished to

be alone with his daughter; and as he walked he found himself puzzling over the doubt that had arisen in him that Fraser was losing his mind, and that Creed knew it. Unless he could suppose that Creed had hit upon the secret of controlling him, he could not imagine any other reason for the influence the young man possessed.

This was a strange idea to occur to Louis, but the more he thought of it the more probable it became.

There was no question that Fraser was an eccentric man. To say nothing of his habits, which had been proof against every demand of courtesy and kindness, his treatment of Helen was nothing short of cruel. Here was a charming girl, a perfect lady, one of the sweetest natures in

the world, imprisoned, so to speak, from society, and deprived, for no conceivable reason, seeing that her father was a well-to-do man, of every innocent pleasure she had a right to expect.

And then Fraser's choice of companions was in the highest degree odd.

Fancy a man in his position restricting himself to such people as Bush and Rodgers and Creed !

To be sure, Helen had explained away this peculiarity, and Louis had been willing to assume selfishness as the reason of it all. But read now by the light of Helen's suspicions and the fancy that had occurred to Louis, the doctor's actions might really be considered as those of a man who was not perfectly master of his reason, though he had sense enough to conceal his melan-

choly infirmity by hiding himself away from society.

Fraser's attending Lady Haddon had been a more singular thing than Louis had allowed himself to think.

True, he himself had asked the doctor to see his mother, but he had done so in full expectation of a cold refusal. Other people, he was certain, might have implored Fraser on their knees to save their mothers' lives without getting more for answer than an icy assurance that he had given up practice.

Why then sit up all night with Lady Haddon, who he knew disliked him?

There was so much generosity in this act that Louis did not like to interpret it in any but a gracious way: but viewed in

connection with the rest of the doctor's behaviour, he could not help thinking that this was but an illustration, after all, of an eccentricity that had suddenly developed into a serious form.

He wondered if Mr. Creed would tell him anything if he asked him.

He must know that he was engaged to Helen, and that he was therefore deeply interested in the doctor.

If there should be no secret, but a mere understanding between the two men, based on trivial matters which would make them laugh when they heard them, it would wonderfully ease Helen's mind.

Indeed, he was so much in love with her that he was always seeking to prove his love by every means in his power: so he determined to ferret out this matter

which bothered her, hoping it would prove of little consequence.

He had half a mind to call on Creed that evening, for it was then only eight o'clock. However, he thought he had better postpone the visit until next day, for that would give him time to reflect over his resolution.

He spent the evening with his mother, saying nothing about Dr. Fraser, for no other reason than because Lady Haddon, when alone with him, cared to talk of nothing but Horace; but all the same he turned the new idea that had got hold of him over and over again in his mind, and found everything he thought of matter to strengthen his suspicion.

He lay awake after he was in bed for some time thinking if his misgiving should

prove true, how he should break the news to Helen, and what course they should adopt, for he had not such confidence in Creed—although he was quite unprejudiced against him—as to consider him a proper person to deal with a matter of such extreme and painful delicacy as Fraser's growing insanity.

So, with no other suspicion in his mind than this, and after a long spell of wakefulness, he fell asleep, and when he awoke it was time to get up.

He went downstairs and was midway through his breakfast—for Lady Haddon kept her bed now till a late hour in the morning—and was thinking all the time how he should begin the subject with Creed, when he saw Dr. Fraser's servant come up the steps of the house and then

go away, while immediately after the letter she had brought was given him.

He guessed by the handwriting that the letter was from the doctor, and opened it, impressed with the novelty of the thing.

He first took out the blank envelope and stared at it with surprise, and then found the slip addressing him, which he read through.

He read it through once and then again, incapable of mastering its import; and then he was seized with fear and turned pale, with the conviction that he had misjudged the secret, and that it was in reality darker and deadlier than anything that could enter his mind to believe.

The slip told him to read the enclosure in the blank envelope to Helen, that he

might be near her to encourage and support her.

“Should I address it to her she might faint on gathering its meaning, and then the letter would be found and read, and the whole town would be talking of me and her.”

The enclosure then was for him as well as for her to know; the envelope was unsealed, he drew the letter out and read it.

As he continued to read he put out his hand to grasp the edge of the table, and, indeed, when he had finished the letter he reeled in his chair as if he would fall from it.

His first thought was :

“Does *she* know this ?”

He looked at the writing with a stupefied

gaze, and seemed to lose all power of action.

But in a moment the import of both communications rushed upon him like a broad glare of light, and he started from his chair as if he would save the unhappy man from the death he threatened.

But he was too violently agitated to sustain his own weight, and he fell back panting as if from a race.

Helen's father the murderer of his brother Horace !

He looked at the letter and read portions of it again.

And *this* was the secret then between Creed and the doctor ! and this was the reason why Fraser had sat up all night with Lady Haddon—why his form was stooped and his face haggard !

What misery! And Helen—his poor Helen!

Her father might be lying dead even then, and she ignorant of his secret and his end!

He rushed from the room and in a moment was walking impetuously towards the Gray House.

A servant opened the door to his hasty knock, and he looked at her eagerly but saw no signs in her manner to lead him to suppose that the doctor was dead.

He might yet be in time to avert this horrible catastrophe.

He asked for Miss Fraser, and the servant imagining that she was still in the dining-room, showed him into the drawing-room, and went her way to seek the young lady.

But scarcely was the door closed than he saw her hiding in the gloomy part of the room.

He ran to her, but as he approached she stood up and extended her arms, as if to keep him from her.

"Oh, Louis!" she exclaimed in a quick febrile whisper; "spare me—do not reproach me—it is my father's wish—my mouth is closed! Oh, leave me—help me to be faithful to him!"

"My darling," he cried, "I know all; I have read the letter, I have come to save him"

She uttered a shriek.

"Does he mean to separate us? tell me!"

"To separate us!" he answered, and then he saw there was more in her words than he could understand.

"He has told me his secret," he went on. "But where is he?"

But she was looking at him with staring eyes.

"Do you say he has told you his secret?" she said.

"Yes, in this letter," and he drew it forth, but would not read it.

"But that letter was to separate us—to tell you I could not marry you."

He could not understand her yet, but not guessing that she knew her father's secret, dared not tell her for fear of breaking her heart; and so he looked at her without answer.

She passed her hand over her eyes.

"He told me I was not to tell you his secret," she said: "no, not for worlds, because you were his brother."

“ Oh, my poor girl—my sweet Helen—he has told you !”

“ Yes,” she answered, moving her hands restlessly ; “ but he could not help it—he did not mean it. Your brother angered him—and he told me the whole story last night, and how that wicked man—my poor father !”

“ But tell me, dearest, why did you think this letter was meant to end our engagement ?”

She threw herself upon his breast and broke into a passion of grief. He soothed and cherished her as best he could, and whilst he did so, and she sobbed so wildly that it was torture to him to feel the convulsions that wrenched her slender form, she told him how Mr. Creed had wanted to marry her, and how her father, to save

himself from being denounced as Horace's murderer, had asked her to give her hand to the miscreant who had his secret.

"Can I see your father?" asked Louis, veritably staggering under this sudden realization of his darling's misery.

"He has not left his room," she replied, choking with sobs.

"Wait for me, Helen," he said, and quitted her hastily.

He knew that Fraser was an early riser, and he shuddered to think of the meaning unconsciously implied by Helen in her answer.

He met a servant on the staircase and asked her to point out the doctor's room. He waited until she was gone and then knocked.

He knocked thrice without receiving any

reply, and then he turned the handle and entered.

He saw what had happened in an instant.

The doctor lay on the outside of the bed, clothed, with the exception of his coat.

There he lay motionless, his face stamped with the signal of death, his eyes half closed, his hands locked upon his chest, as if he had died with the resolution to preserve an aspect of dignified composure in death.

How he had killed himself there was nothing to explain, save a small piece of lump-sugar near his hands which Louis brushed away. The window blinds were up, and the full glare of the morning

light was upon the room and on the body.

Louis touched the hands—they were cold.

Then as the frightful revelation smote him with its fullest force, he turned his eyes helplessly towards the door, and there saw Helen.

“What is it?” she whispered, and she came into the room quickly. “Is he asleep,—tell me? He has not undressed . . . he . . . he . . . Oh my God! he is dead!”

She shrieked and flung herself upon the body.

“Helen! Helen!” Louis implored, “for his sake, for your own sake, have courage. God is merciful. Think of Him. Oh Helen, come to me.”

And he seized her and by main force imprisoned her in his arms, whilst he spoke to her rapidly.

“ See! he has done this to save himself from Creed—and to save you. He may not yet be dead, and we waste precious time by this grief. I have his letter in my pocket, and you shall hear it downstairs. Oh Helen, love me and have courage. Yes—yes—cry, my own sweet girl—and take my hand: and see, my own, I am kissing you: for you are my jewel and my precious one, and he has given you to me. We will go downstairs and send for Dr. Langhorne, and if he be dead, my dearest one . . . Hush! my Helen! Think, it must not be known that he died by his own hand. Think of that! We have his secret, and oh, have courage,

for God loves you and will help us now."

And with his own heart wrung with unspeakable grief and horror, the brave boy tenderly, with his arms about her, led her away from the chamber of death back into the drawing-room.

There he placed her upon the sofa and then ran out to dispatch a servant for Langhorne, and quickly returned to Helen and knelt by her, speaking such tender encouraging words as his grieved heart at that time could dictate.

And she was incessantly sobbing. "He has killed himself for me! that I may be happy . . ." but her grief was too great not to expend its full torrent soon, and then she listened to him and allowed him to recall her to a sense of the faith that

had supported her through many secret trials—though none so great as this.

Presently she begged him to read the letter her father had written : he did so and she began to cry piteously again with low wailing cries : but the intensity of grief had exhausted her, and her moaning died away in long thrilling sobs.

The necessity of courage gave Louis courage, otherwise he must have sunk under the accumulated misery of that morning.

He clearly perceived the need of disguising the truth of the doctor's death for Helen's and his own sake, and explained his reasons to her.

The sudden death of such a man as Fraser, surrounded by all comforts and

with no sorrow to afflict him that the world knew of, would certainly be attributed to natural causes, providing Helen's grief would enable her to keep the secret.

Undoubtedly Fraser had poisoned himself, and with a skill that should baffle the penetration of such doctors as Milborough boasted ; that he would take care to do : and it remained for Helen and Louis to account for his death or leave the medical decision that should be passed undisturbed.

As for Creed, Louis thought he could see his way with that scoundrel when the leisure to deal with him should be permitted.

Dr. Langhorne soon came to the house, and was conducted upstairs by the awe-

stricken servants who now knew that their master was dead. Louis dared not leave Helen's side.

In five minutes Langhorne put his head into the drawing-room and summoned Louis, who with an entreaty to Helen to control herself, followed him.

"I am shocked—very much shocked," said Langhorne. "He is quite dead."

"It is dreadful."

"What was his age?"

"About fifty-six."

"Ah! a melancholy ending of a valuable life."

"What caused his death?"

"Why, that I can't say. Apoplexy, or heart disease—there is no telling. There should be an examination."

"Oh, Miss Fraser would not permit it."

"Well, but an inquest . . ."

"Yes, but consider the child's feelings."

"Oh, I'll not enforce it. The poor man no doubt knew what ailed him. I can see how it was with him. He had known his danger from symptoms which, I have heard, have shown themselves for a long time past : and whilst undressing to go to bed, was suddenly seized and laid down and died. Poor Miss Fraser! Can I be of any service, Haddon?"

"None, I am obliged to you. I will attend to her and remove her to my house as soon as I can."

"Yes, yes, you should do that. Lady Haddon will console her. Poor man! but these secret diseases are very treacherous. Often it happens that the heartiest looking men carry a death in

their heads or bosoms that may strike them down before they can gasp out, 'Lord have mercy!'"

And the doctor went his way to bear the news to whomsoever should cross his path.

Louis returned to Helen. She looked the picture of death, white, miserable, exhausted.

Indeed she had suffered too much, and as Louis took her in his arms he thought that she must die.

"Helen, you must come home with me. You must leave this gloomy house. You will need care and quiet, and my mother shall nurse you."

"Oh Louis, if she should find out . . ."

"She shall not find out. We need fear no one but Creed, and your poor father

has left me to deal with him, and I will. I'll send one of the servants for a carriage . . ."

"Oh poor papa! poor lonely papa! I must not leave him, Louis!"

"Yes, Helen. You can do no good by stopping here. For my sake, Helen—"

"For your sake?" she answered, looking up at him.

"Yes, darling, for my sake you will do what I ask."

She closed her eyes and murmured,—

"We are still apart, we must always be apart."

"Why do you say that?" he cried, almost fearing that she was growing delirious.

She clasped her poor white hands and said,—

"You ought not to love me. Think of what papa did and what he has made your mother suffer. Oh Louis, you cannot marry the daughter of the man who killed your brother."

"Cannot!" he said. "Noble Helen! noble in your heart—noble in your self-sacrifices—the fittest of all God's creatures to do His work, if there should be anything in this wide world capable of separating me from you, I should be unworthy of you! if your father's innocent wrong did not bring you closer to my heart for very reverence of the holy qualities it has proved you to possess, then might I hope never to be forgiven the most unmanly sin my love could be guilty of. My own darling . . . My sweet suffering Helen!"

He opened his arms . she leaned forward
to be clasped . smiled and closed her eyes
and tremed .

CHAPTER VIII.

MR. CREED.

"Dame. O, sir! have I forestall'd your honest market?
Found your close walks? You stand amazed!
Now, do you? Ah, hide, hide your face for shame."

BEN JONSON.

WITHIN an hour from the time of Louis's arrival at the Gray House, he had conveyed Helen in a carriage to his mother's. She could scarcely walk, and seemed, indeed, hardly conscious, and he dared not speak for fear of exciting her, although she always smiled languidly when their eyes met.

He carried her from the carriage into the house, and placed her tenderly upon the sofa, and then went to summon his mother.

Lady Haddon was dressing, and he begged her to make haste, as he had sad news to tell her, though he could not convey it yet, as her door was closed.

In a very short time she opened her door, all excitement and nervousness.

"What is it, Louis?"

"Dr. Fraser has died suddenly, and my poor Helen is half killed by the shock. She is downstairs."

"What!" shrieked Lady Haddon; "Dr. Fraser dead! that fine healthy man!" and she staggered as she raised her arms with consternation.

"It is quite true, and Helen is broken-

hearted. Oh, mother, you know how she loved him! Come to her, and help me to comfort her. She is in your hands now. You can repay the debt you owe him by cherishing her."

And he ran downstairs to Helen, to nurse her hand and watch by her until his mother arrived.

Lady Haddon was soon dressed, and when she saw Helen she cried out,—

"My poor dear child! but you are with those who love you. I will be your mother, Helen," and kissed her affectionately.

Indeed, her own sorrow made her keenly sympathetic.

"We must have Dr. Langhorne," she said hurriedly to her son. "Helen should be got to bed at once, and kept perfectly quiet, and in a dark room."

She instantly ran out to despatch one servant for Dr. Langhorne and another servant to get ready the spare bedroom.

In truth, she was more in her element than she had been since her son's death; for her sympathies, which had nothing to attach themselves to whilst things went evenly, had now a congenial grief to fasten upon.

"Come, my love," she exclaimed, returning to the dining-room, and hanging over Helen, who lay quite still, with a white face and open eyes, half vacant in their expression, while she breathed slowly, with a thin tremulous sound in the respiration. "Come upstairs. No, you can't walk. But Louis shall carry you. Take her, Louis, gently. There, my dear; lean

your head upon his arm—that's it. Go slowly, Louis. Oh, my love! we have both our griefs. And indeed you have my love. That's right."

And thus speaking, she followed Louis upstairs.

He placed Helen on the bed, but lingered near her, as if he could not tear himself away; and when his mother touched him on the arm, he kissed his love, leaving a tear upon her cheek, and walked from the room.

He waited outside for a while, listening with strained ears, partly in dread of the delirium he feared was upon Helen, partly in dread of the words she might babble should she grow unconscious. If ever his mother was to know the terrible secret that had killed Dr. Fraser, the disclosure must

not be made now. No, not now ; for he knew how the shock would affect her, how the discovery would chill, harden, and alienate her from the sweet orphan who never more needed all that human tenderness could do than then.

He went slowly downstairs, and when in the hall, Dr. Langhorne knocked, and Louis admitted him.

“What now ?” he said. “I seem to pursue you.”

Louis told him hurriedly, and the doctor went upstairs, whilst Louis waited in the room below to receive his account.

He had now leisure for thought, and it seemed to him that up to that moment he had not realised the full extent of the calamity that had exposed the secret of his

brother's death and made an orphan of Helen.

He thought of Creed, and a kind of fury possessed him.

There was something overwhelming in the wickedness of that man. He could not imagine any kind of villainy that was not almost virtuous compared with the cold-blooded, calculating, inexorable rascality of that miscreant.

He had not the faintest doubt of the truth of the doctor's story; and when he considered the misery the unhappy man had endured, the anguish of the proud spirit hiding its guilt in hypocritical garb, for ever wrung and tortured by the menaces of Creed, stooping to lick the very dust off the knave's feet, that by such posture-making he might keep the man his

friend, his heart sank within him with deep and helpless compassion.

And Helen! The thought of what she had suffered when her father told her his secret, and explained to her the frightful price of silence exacted by Creed, was more than he could bear.

Could she think for a moment that her father's guilt, though it had been hateful as a premeditated crime, would sunder them—would cause him to think her unworthy of him—would cause him, indeed, to consider himself one jot more worthy by her descent as her father's child in the scale of moral loveliness—of the holy beauty and the priceless treasure of her nature God had suffered him to know and win?

But consideration of Creed obliged him to break off in these thoughts, at once so

bitter and so sweet. Dr. Fraser had left the man to *him*, and whatever was to be done must be done quickly.

He paced about the room in earnest thought, and then he saw his way.

But before he left the house he must first hear what Dr. Langhorne had to say. So he went into the hall to wait until the doctor came downstairs.

In about five minutes the old gentleman made his appearance, and took Louis by the arm.

"Now, Haddon," said he, "I can see your feelings in your face, and I don't mean to frighten you, and I don't mean to encourage you either. The truth is this, Miss Fraser has received a violent shock, which has tried her to the last limits of her powers. You understand. Those powers must re-

cover their strength and tone, and I can prescribe nothing but quiet. She must be kept quiet, but not left alone. You may see her now and again, but you must take care, my friend, to carry a cheerful face to her bed-side, and say nothing to set her mind running backwards. I will look in this afternoon."

"Will she have a fever like my mother, do you think?"

"I hope not. She has a very tranquil nature. Your mother is excitable, or she would not have had a fever. Don't go near her at present. She is in good hands."

The doctor went away; and when he had been gone some minutes, Louis left the house.

He walked quickly, and there was some-

thing both in his manner and in the expression of his face which would have made the most sneerful of his late brother's associates hesitate to call him milksop—at least, in his hearing.

He was very pale when he started, but by degrees the colour mounted to his cheeks, and a keen fire sparkled in his blue eyes.

He went down the High Street, and then turned into another street containing private houses and a few shops. He presently came to a pause before one of these shops, which bore the name of Squirrel upon a brass window-plate, and knocked at the private entrance.

A servant opened the door.

“Is Mr. Creed at home?”

“Yes, sir.”

"Can I see him?"

"He is at breakfast."

"No matter."

"What name, sir?"

"Announce me as a gentleman."

The servant went up a dark flight of stairs, and Louis followed close behind. She tapped on a door, but before she could speak, Louis pushed past her and closed the door behind him.

The room was a cheerful one—called by Mr. Squirrel a drawing-room—and the sunshine streamed pleasantly upon gay-coloured chairs and carpet, and on a table covered with a white cloth and smoking with hot coffee and the incense of bacon.

Mr. Creed sat at this table, with his feet in slippers, and in a blue dressing-gown,

which disclosed a shirt ornamented with gold studs, but without any collar.

It was plain that Mr. Creed had only just got out of bed, for he was unshaved, and, in consequence, looked extraordinarily yellow and livid. His bed-room could be seen through the folding-doors, with the bed tossed, and his coat and boots on the floor.

He was reading the "Milborough Gazette," which did service in the town for the London newspapers until they arrived, but instantly put it down and rose from his chair.

"Why, Mr. Haddon," he exclaimed in a perfectly self-possessed tone, "this is a pleasure I had not anticipated. Pray be seated. I hope you have not breakfasted, that I may enjoy your company at my table."

Louis had put his hat down on a chair, but instead of taking a seat, he walked up to the table and leaned upon it, not noticing Mr. Creed's out-stretched hand.

"You have just left your bed, I think, Mr. Creed?"

"I have."

"Then you have not heard the news?"

"Why, scarcely," answered Mr. Creed, with a soft smile. "Won't you sit down? . . . I am sure you will excuse me if I do."

He resumed his chair and stroked his chin, looking queerly at Louis.

"You don't ask me what the news is, Mr. Creed."

"Pray tell me, Mr. Haddon."

"Dr. Fraser is dead," said Louis.

Creed turned slightly pale, but this

change was scarcely visible upon the yellow ground of his complexion.

He took his breath for an instant and then said,—

“You surprise me.”

“Do I? I am in luck, Mr. Creed. I did not conceive you to be a man capable of so honest an emotion as surprise . . . Stop a moment! Dr. Fraser is dead, by his own hand.”

“Oh! committed suicide.”

“Yes, committed suicide. . . But the proper interpretation of his act is—he was murdered.”

“Then he didn’t commit suicide,” said Creed, lifting his eyes from the ground and sending them travelling nimbly over his visitor’s person.

No doubt he noticed that that visitor

was very broad-chested and had an upright figure, and that there was a light in his clear eyes that not only indicated resolution, but courage, to make it available.

"Yes, he did — but he was also murdered—by you."

"Come, sir, I shall be glad to understand the object of your visit."

"Why then, I'll not keep you in suspense. My object in coming here is to tell you that you are one of the greatest villains that a just God ever permitted to wrong His creatures."

Mr. Creed shrugged his shoulders.

"There are murderers," Louis continued, "more cruel than those who content themselves with shedding blood—more fiendish than those who confine their prowess to

cutting unprotected throats or stabbing unguarded breasts, and you are one of them. . . Hold! keep your seat. You know me by reputation perhaps as one who loves peace. But in my dealings with human nature my experiences have hitherto been restricted to men and women whose passions and failings I understand and share. But *your* nature is new to me. . . Move! and I swear as I am a man that I will throw you out of the window!"

He leaned forward with one hand clenched, his nostrils dilated, his eyes on fire.

Mr. Creed was very yellow indeed, now: a sickly deadly yellow, unpleasant to behold.

He fell back in his chair and stooped

his head and cowered as though fearing a blow.

He rallied in a few moments and said,—

“ I have done nothing to *you* to bring you here bullying me in this fashion.”

“ Nothing to me, who am betrothed to Miss Fraser ? you scoundrel !”

“ What do you mean ? I had his secret : I could have hanged him.”

“ No, you couldn’t.”

“ What ! not for murder ? what’s the penalty for murder ?”

“ Dr. Fraser did not commit murder.”

“ I say he did,” shrieked Creed : “ and I could have got him hanged !”

“ I am very wrong in my belief if I can’t hang *you*. You have lived upon this poor man how long ?”

"That's my business," answered Creed, looking at the knife on his plate.

Louis saw that look and before you could have cried "hold!" pulled the cloth off the table.

The crockery fell with a heavy smash and Creed started to his feet.

Louis approached him by a stride.

"We are equal now. Sit down."

"This . . . this," gasped Creed.

"Sit down, I tell you," said Louis, raising his hand.

The man sat down and then he grew terrified.

"Tell me what you want, sir, and go away, and I'll obey you. Did Dr. Fraser tell you that he killed your brother? That was his secret. He murdered him one night, and asked me to help him to

hide the body, and out of pity I gave him a hand. Do you think it was a job that I liked : it was ugly and risky and I expected to be paid for it."

"He did pay you for it."

"And where's the harm? any other man, rich or poor, would have looked for payment."

"He has paid you not only in money, but blood."

"What do you mean?"

"What I say. You ought to be satisfied."

"Well, if he's dead I can't help it, and there's an end of it. And now I should like to be left alone," said Creed, venturing to raise his eyes as high as Louis' face.

"You wanted to marry Miss Fraser."

A dusky hue overspread Creed's face

and he gave Louis a look more deadly and sinister than can be described.

"Yes, Mr. Haddon, I did," he answered, "and what's more I would have had her but for her father's cowardice."

There was something horribly provoking in the villain's impudence. Louis had to strain his full will to keep back the thirsty passionate longing to leap upon the man.

"Now look here," said Creed forcing one of the sickliest of smiles, "be fair, Mr. Haddon. I'll put it to you as a gentleman, only there's no arguing if you lose your temper and turn upon me with insulting words. I wanted money, and when a man wants money he'll do desperate things. Won't he now—I put it to you as a gentleman."

Louis made no answer but kept his eyes fixed upon him as he would upon a dog that might fly at him if he removed his gaze.

Creed waited a moment or two for his reply and then continued :

“You were never poor, and therefore don’t know what it is to work like a stone-breaker for twenty pounds a year in a cheap school. I wanted a better prospect than that, and when an opportunity came I took it. You would have done the same thing had you been in my place. It’s very easy for a well-to-do man to preach morality,” he went on, his eyes glittering and his hands moving uneasily, “because morality is easy to him—he doesn’t know what it is to be tempted—or if he is tempted, he has comforts and

reputation, which he wouldn't care to risk, and so they support him and make him virtuous—his heart has nothing to do with it. I gave Dr. Fraser a hand in that unpleasant matter, and looked to be rewarded as any other man in his senses would: he was a rich man and couldn't miss what he gave."

"How much money have you had from him altogether?"

"I decline to answer."

"Five hundred pounds?"

Creed remained silent.

"Whatever you have you shall return," said Louis.

Creed broke out passionately.

"I'll take my oath I haven't more than four pounds in the world! I swear solemnly this is all I have got."

He pulled a purse from his pocket, opened it and the sum he named rolled out upon the table.

"I was better off," he muttered looking at the gold, "before I knew him."

"You have robbed that poor man mercilessly ever since my brother's death, and that is all you have left of your plunder?"

"It is, I swear it."

"Well, I will believe you—not because you swear it, but because you are thorough villain enough to be a fool too, do you understand? You counted on your victim living for some years yet, and spent all he gave you in expectation of more and more. Keep that money: It will enable you to leave Milborough."

"I don't mean to leave Milborough."

"Indeed!"

"Indeed!" echoed Creed savagely.

"And why not?"

"Because," said Creed through his teeth, "I have a secret to tell and don't mean to leave until I have found a purchaser."

"And pray what is your secret?"

"Why, that Dr. Fraser is a murderer," answered Creed.

"But he was not a murderer, Mr. Creed."

"I can prove it. I tell you I can prove it," Creed shrieked. "He was kneeling by the body when I went into his study, and when he saw me he cried out, 'I have murdered him!' So there is his own confession."

"Who heard him say that?"

"I did."

"And who else?"

"I did—I—I!" screamed Creed, striking his breast furiously.

"And when it is known that you carried my brother's body to the river . . ."

"Fraser helped me!"

"—and kept the doctor's secret that you might extort money from him, you think your bare word would be taken, do you?"

"Yes, I do."

"And what then?"

"Why then the girl you are going to marry will be branded as a murderer's daughter, and that's what you won't like when you're a clergyman, Mr. Haddon."

"In order to save Miss Fraser from the charge you say you can bring against her father, we are to pay you money?"

He spoke in such a subdued tone that Creed was deceived.

"You shall name your own price," he exclaimed eagerly. "I only want a little money to begin the world again with."

"I will name my own price. To-morrow morning at half-past eleven I shall come to these lodgings of yours accompanied by the Inspector of Police, and if I find you here I will give you into custody."

"I defy you," said Creed.

"That you may do. But now listen. It is of some little consequence, I admit, that the grief which Dr. Fraser's death has caused his daughter should not be embittered by the false charge you have villainy enough in you to bring against his memory. On the other hand it is of very

great consequence that such a scoundrel as you should be given up to justice. I shall require only a few hours reflection to make up my mind whether to consider an additional pang to Miss Fraser's grief of greater importance than the escape of a cowardly rogue. I shall know certainly to-morrow morning how to act; and I swear that at eleven o'clock I shall be here with the Inspector, that if I catch you here or learn that you are anywhere in Milborough, I shall give you in custody; and no tenderness for the memory of my dead friend nor for the feelings of his child, shall make me hesitate to charge you with conspiracy and murder."

He took his hat and turned to leave the room.

"Stop!" shrieked Creed. "I have

only four pounds. Give me some money and I will leave Milborough."

But Louis made no answer and walked out of the house.

CHAPTER IX.

THE DEAD.

"O Land ! O Land !
For all the broken-hearted !
The mildest herald by our fate allotted,
Beckons and with inverted torch doth stand
To lead us with a gentle hand
Into the land of the great Departed,
Into the Silent Land !"—LONGFELLOW.

LOUIS took a deep breath when he was in the street, for the part he had been playing was a desperately hard one, and now that the performance was ended he felt exhausted.

He walked towards his home, and as he went he reflected upon what he had said and felt that he had done well.

No mercy indeed ought to have been shown to Creed : he was so bad a man, had submitted the unfortunate Dr. Fraser to sufferings so afflicting to conceive, that Louis could not imagine any kind of punishment that should be too severe for him.

But still it was better to give him the chance of escaping from Milborough, than arresting him and so compelling him to tell the whole story of the doctor's misfortune, which he would take care to represent as murder, and supply scandal enough to the gossips to render it impossible for Helen to remain in the town.

Nor was this all.

Lady Haddon had learned to love Helen, had sanctioned their marriage, and had made Louis happy by the promises her conduct suggested of amiability and tenderness in the future for his sweet young wife.

But all this would be changed were she to learn that it was Helen's father who had robbed her of the son for whom her heart still bled. There was not the slightest necessity that she should ever know it: and as much then for this reason as his horror that Helen should be made to suffer through the infamous lies of Creed, did he earnestly hope that when the morrow came he should find that that miscreant had left Milborough.

He had in a measure tranquillised his mind when he reached his home, and when

he was in the hall, his mother, who had heard him come in, descended the stairs.

“Helen has been wanting you, Louis. Where have you been?”

“Is she better, mother?”

“Why, my dear, she can’t very well be *better* in this short time?” said Lady Had-don, “but she is not worse. She is a very religious girl, and has a wonderfully placid nature, and she is drawing more strength and courage and comfort from her own heart than ever I or anybody else could convey to her. But before you go to her, Louis, just tell me about Dr. Fraser. I am so shocked that I scarcely know what I am about.”

“Why, mother, the story is this: I went to the Gray House this morning to see Dr. Fraser, and finding he was not up,

asked to be shown to his bedroom. I knocked several times without getting any answer, and that frightened me, and so I opened the door and there I found him lying dead on the bed."

"Oh, shocking! Oh, how fearful to die so suddenly! And does he lie there now as you saw him?"

"I suppose so. After I have seen Helen I will go to the Gray House. And now, mother, I must see her."

He crept on tiptoe to the door and softly knocked. He heard her faint voice and went in.

"Darling," she said, and put out her hand.

"My pet! my sweet Helen!"

"I have been wanting you, Louis," she whispered.

"I have been out—I have been seeing Creed," he answered: and he went on quickly, "I have ordered him to leave the town by to-morrow morning, and I feel sure that my threats will make him go."

"Oh, what a wicked man, Louis!"

"So wicked that he must be a fiend. My pet was right in her suspicions. She had keen eyes when I was blind. But he will go and we shall see him no more."

She was silent and presently said, while a shiver ran through her:

"I think of papa lying all alone in that gloomy old house. My place is by his side. I am strong enough to get up and go to him."

"No, you are not strong enough, but I am going to him."

"Oh, Louis, I shall never see him again."

How can I talk of him without tears? But I think I have cried all my tears away. For my sake, dearest, kneel by his bedside and pray God to forgive him. Oh, poor papa! how I loved him! how noble I thought him!—and—and I seem to love him all the more for the dreadful suffering he has gone through . . . and it was I who killed him!"

"Don't say that, Helen."

"Oh, but he died to save me from that man!" she exclaimed in a feeble whisper.

"He died, Helen, because that man had taken all the happiness out of his life. Creed is his murderer. May God remember him!"

"I can't bear to think of him lying all alone there. Oh, Louis! do you forgive him? he killed poor Horace."

“Forgive him!” he answered in a voice of deep compassion; “yes, most truly—most truly. But he needs no forgiveness. His sin does not lie *there*—for I know that Horace could speak such insults as would madden an angel—but in hiding his secret from those who loved him, and in . . . we will say no more. I love you, Helen! it is my joy to feel, to know, to prove it.”

“Dearest Louis!”

“You must keep your lips sealed on the subject of Horace’s death. My mother must never know the truth for all our sakes.”

“No, I will be silent.”

“Perfectly silent. The discovery would alienate her, and I want her love for you and me.”

“I will not tell her, Louis.”

"Hush, my sweet! I hear her coming upstairs. For my sake have courage, trust in me, and love me. Your illness would break my heart. Resolve to bear up against this heavy affliction for my sake."

"I will do anything, everything for your sake, dearest one."

The door opened; he kissed her, and whispering to his mother as he passed her that he was going to the Gray House, he went downstairs.

The servants at the Gray House were glad to see him. They were in the dining-room conversing in whispers, not knowing what to do. There was no head to rule or direct them now that Helen was taken from the house, and the poor things remained waiting wistfully for some

one to see to the dead and set them to work.

Louis at once gave them directions which dispersed them, some into the town, some about the house, and then went upstairs where the dead man lay.

A servant had pulled the blinds down, but no one had covered the face.

In the sobered light the corpse looked less awful in its terrible rigidity than it had appeared to Louis with the early sunshine streaming over it.

The face was very calm ; it seemed impossible that it could ever have expressed suffering. The formidable corrugation of the brow that gathered the heavy eyebrows together and formed the habitual expression in the later days of the poor man's life, was smoothed out: with his half-closed

eyes he seemed, indeed, lost in deepest thought, as if meditating the unspeakable mysteries he had been summoned by death to view.

Louis went to the dressing-table and took a pair of scissors, with which he reverently cut a lock of hair from the noble motionless head; and then stood for a moment or two gazing at the face before covering it.

A world of mingled emotions and memories swept through him. There lay the man whom Helen had adored, the man of bright intellect and discerning thought, and quick impulse, so cold and helpless and dead and unseeing that there was no fire that could warm him, no taunt arouse him, no eloquence move him, no shapes of beauty thrill him. The gifted spirit, the

radiant mind, had soared out of its shell into the light that falls not upon this lower world. To Louis the helplessness of the man was an overwhelming sense. No imperious summons now could bring, no angry question rebuke, the servants for leaving him alone. His will now was the consent of others : and that consent was a shuddering and terrified submission to the common humanity he would have abhorred as the discharger of his offices. Strange that death should work such transformations. Strange that the lack of light in the eyes, of sound in the mouth, of movement in the face, should provoke horror where admiration had been the tribute—dismay, where respect had been often so officious as sometimes to merit the reproach of servility.

With a farewell glance at the cold and

rigid face, Louis threw the covering gently over it, then fell on his knees and prayed as Helen had asked him, and as his own heart bade him.

At half-past ten o'clock next morning Louis stood holding his hat, talking to his mother. He had just come from Helen's room and was now repeating to his mother the thanks Helen had asked him to give. Indeed, Lady Haddon richly deserved their gratitude; for, in imitation of the example of Dr. Fraser, she had, unknown to Louis, crept into Helen's room when the household was asleep, and so tended the patient through the whole night.

"At all events," she said with a gratified smile, "I think Helen is better this morning, don't you?"

“Thank God, yes, much better. She will love you for your kindness. It makes a bright spot for her on the gloom of this sad time. It is everything for her to feel that she has only lost one parent to gain another.”

“Leave her to me, Louis. I will be as her own mother to her, and, indeed, she deserves my love. Such a gentle loving creature never lived. It almost makes me ashamed of my own bitter grief to see how she endures hers; how resigned, affectionate, and deeply grateful she is. But where are you going, Louis?”

“I have an appointment at eleven.”

“You must not be long away. It does Helen good to know that you are in the house and can see her when she wishes.”

How can I talk of him without tears? But I think I have cried all my tears away. For my sake, dearest, kneel by his bedside and pray God to forgive him. Oh, poor papa! how I loved him! how noble I thought him!—and—and I seem to love him all the more for the dreadful suffering he has gone through . . . and it was I who killed him!”

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With a farewell glance at the cold and

"Yes, I do," interrupted Louis quietly.
"I withdraw the charge. I am sorry to
have troubled you, Mr. ——."

And there the matter ended.

CHAPTER X.

CONCLUDING NOTICE.

WE shall have to deal summarily with old Father Time before we can complete this story, and in beginning this chapter the reader will be pleased to consider that five years have passed since matters were brought to the point at which we have just left them.

Some changes have taken place in these five years, and to comprehend one of them, at least, we have but to peep

over the railings of the grave-yard that lies around the noble Milborough Church, where, quite near enough for us to read the inscription, we shall behold a large and handsome piece of monumental marble sacred to the memory of Elizabeth, relict of the late Sir Louis Haddon, K.C.B. who died . . . and the legend goes on and tells all that need be known.

Not far from that memorial is another tomb, likewise conspicuous by the size and beauty of its marble, and there Dr. Fraser lies buried.

So, almost side by side, sleep the two people who in life were the involuntary agents of the grief that killed them both.

For Lady Haddon never really recovered the loss of her son. That was a pain in her heart which increased upon her

as the months went by, and she fretted internally, so that whilst her constitution was making all efforts to build itself up again, her tears were sapping its very foundations, and a brief illness extinguished her flickering life as a candle is blown out by a breath.

But she kept the promise she had made Louis to love Helen as her own daughter; and her tenderness was largely repaid, for Helen loved her with more than the devotion of a child, and her sweet and deep affection followed the poor lady to the very gates of death. She died ignorant of the secret of her son's death. The suspicion that he had been killed had long passed out of her mind, and she would speak of him as fully convinced that he had been drowned by accident.

Even stubborn old Rodgers admitted, after four years, that he was wrong : saying to Louis that, all things considered, and particularly taking into account that Horace was often intoxicated, and that if he had been murdered, some kind of discovery would have been made before then to prove the crime if not to convict the offender, he could not but allow that it was very probable that Horace *had* been drowned. And Louis did not contradict him.

And so five years passed away, and at the end of that time Louis, a tolerably rich man, but spending much in charity, was living with his wife in a house just outside the town, at the foot of Carnmore Hill, so that they could look up the towering grassy slope from the back windows,

and see the summit in the evening gilt with sunshine when the twilight was all about them.

Louis had been some years a clergyman now. His probation had before endeared him to the people ; and his refusal of a living offered him by Lord Torchester, that he might remain among those whom he knew and loved, working as a curate and rejecting the emolument and position he had but to accept, in the belief that his poor needed him and would suffer by his removal, made him so wonderfully popular that even at this early stage there was a talk in the town of building him a church in case he should not be appointed as Mr. Morgan's successor, rather than lose him.

His little home was certainly the

prettiest in Milborough : a mere cottage, but an exquisite picture with its big bay windows plentifully mantled with vine-leaves coloured with bright spots by the flowers of the creeping parasites that enriched the porch and breathed rich perfumes into the bed-room windows ; and a thick growth of shrubbery in the front, fruits of many years of sturdy cultivation, and high trees shading it from the noon-tide heat and relieving, with their deeper green, the emerald background of the hill. It was a home such as would make a permanent picture in the mind of its possessor as a cool and shady resting-place after the toil and burden of the day, and an impulse, too, to encourage him to labour for the very reward it would give to his weariness.

In a room in this house, one splendid July afternoon, Helen was playing with her boy, a little fellow three years old. The window—an upper one, for this was the nursery—was wide open, and the warm summer air came in; and what with the heat and the exercise, Helen's face glowed.

She was now in the full perfection of her youth and beauty, and all was ripe and full and luxuriant, but wanting nothing of the graceful chasteness and maidenly purity of look, gesture, manner, that was the best and most notable characteristic of her girlhood. The colour of her eyes had slightly deepened, and as she paused to take breath and looked at her boy they were alight with the fire of pride and happiness. It was delightful

to hear the full melody of her laughter as she put out her little foot to the child and drew it back again from the chubby hands which made enormous and unheard of efforts to grasp it. Indeed she now enjoyed life after a serene and womanly manner, and had, ever since the gloom her father's death had thrown upon her had lifted from her heart. She loved her husband, she adored her baby, she was grateful to God for her happiness, and the girlish spirit that had slept through her companionless life now came forth to animate her, and make a child of her in her pleasures and laughter.

And certainly her son was a toddles a mother would hold it an ecstasy to enrage with kisses ; blue-eyed, curly-headed, with so soft a neck that Helen could bury

her nose out of sight in the snow of it, and little gleaming teeth well called milk-teeth because the breath that came through them was as fragrant as clover, and fat staggering legs and a huge capacity of tears which a sponge-cake to eat, or something novel and surprising to play with, would put to flight more quickly than a handkerchief could dry them.

A fond husband, a sweet child, a charming home—here were the interests to bring out all the deep sympathies, all the touching sweetness, of Helen's nature ; and they gave her power to sound the springs of human nature, and draw from them exquisite conceptions of charity, and keen perception of human needs, so that the help she gave her husband made his own labours of abiding value, and might

be likened to a strain of music giving sweetness and significance to honest and hearty words of poetry.

She had spent the greater part of the morning in Milborough, and was now passing the afternoon in a romp with her child. This indeed was the whole phrasing of her present life.

Master Louis was rather backward with his tongue and could speak clearly not above half a dozen words, although thirty-six months old ; but he had a diction of his own which might have impressed a Chinaman with its extraordinary no-meaning, but which was as intelligible to mamma as the English of Goldsmith.

He was not tired, but she was : but that he didn't mind, and invited her to roll him about, and even got upon his legs that he.

might tempt her to assault him : but half an hour's boisterous laughter and exercise and conversation in the no-meaning language just mentioned, was as much as she could stand : so informing the rosy young gentleman that mamma was tired, she threw herself into an arm-chair to recover her breath, while Master Louis, to show the superiority of his sex's endurance to that of the degenerate species his mother belonged to, set to work to measure the room with his legs so wide apart that Helen had to shriek to him to walk like papa, lest he should rend himself into two distinct pieces.

Her hair was wild, her cheeks red, her eyes gleaming with light from her heart ; she made the loveliest picture in the world —that of a young mother dishevelled

with the sport and caresses of her child—her lips crimson from kissing, her white hands drooping with weariness of picking the little thing up and pressing it to her face.

She left her chair in a few minutes to arrange her hair, and as she stood before the mantelpiece her husband came in.

She turned to give him the kiss he never entered or quitted the house without receiving, but was stopped by the unusual gravity of his face.

“Helen,” he said, “ring for the nurse and come with me downstairs. I have something to tell you.”

She instantly rang the bell, but asked no questions, while he went to his boy and kissed him.

He was very little changed ; there was perhaps more maturity in the expression of his face, but then his clerical suit would impart a certain soberness. He had the appearance of a man who worked hard, and the dust upon his trousers and boots showed that one of his afternoon excursions, at least, had been extended beyond the limits of the stone pavements.

The nurse came promptly, and Helen, made thoughtful by Louis' subdued manner, followed him downstairs.

They entered a fragrant sunshiny room and Louis said :

" I have met with a strange adventure this afternoon, Helen."

" What, dearest ?"

" I went to see Goodman in Cambridge

Street. I had not been near him for a week, and wished to know if he were better and if I could do anything for him. He opened the door himself, and after I had been talking to him a little time he said : ' Oh Mr. Haddon, did they tell you what happened here last evening ?' I told him no. ' I was sitting,' he said, ' by myself, my wife having gone as far as Market Street to receive some money that was owed to her, when some one knocked on my door, and when I looked out I saw a crowd of people standing just in front of my house around a man who had fallen down. The person who had knocked asked me if I knew the man, for it had been said that he was coming to my house when he was seen to fall. So,' said Goodman, ' I went to look at him, but didn't

know him. I thought he was dead, and my door being open they brought him in and then went for the doctor. The doctor came, and said that he wasn't dead, but couldn't possibly last longer than the night.' And then," continued Louis, "the doctor asked Goodman if the man was known. Goodman answered that he had never seen him before. So he was put upon Goodman's bed, and presently he revived, but refused to give his name, and said that he was a stranger and had walked fifteen miles that morning without tasting food, and that he hadn't a farthing in his pocket."

"How shocking!" exclaimed Helen.

"Goodman asked me if I would see him. I said yes, and he led me into the back room, where I saw the unfortunate

creature lying in poor Goodman's miserable bed. His face was frightfully white and bloodless and he had a grisly moustache and beard, and yet, Helen—and yet, dearest, I knew him at once, as he knew me at once."

Helen stared.

"It was Creed," said Louis.

She uttered a cry, and the flush that lingered on her cheeks faded out of them instantly.

"Creed!" she ejaculated.

"Helen, I was awfully shocked. Whilst I live I shall never forget the look he gave me when he pronounced my name. He tried to smile and then he turned his face to the wall and sobbed."

Helen clasped her hands.

"I drew a chair to his side," continued

Louis, "and addressed him. I hardly know what I said. He put out his thin hand—a mere skeleton of a hand—and said, whilst he kept his face turned away, that he was starving, that he was dying, and begged me to have mercy upon him, and that he had been a bad man.' I was more moved by the sight of his misery than I should have cared to let him know, and was glad he kept his eyes off my face. I begged him to tell me what I could do. He answered, nothing, that he was dying, that he would be dead in an hour. 'You can do nothing,' he said, 'but forgive me.' I told him I did that freely—that both you and I had done so long ago—Helen, I could not help saying it—and after a little, he told me his story. He had left Milborough a beggar. I know that was true,

because when I went to see him that morning—how long ago it seems!—to order him to leave the town, he emptied his purse, which contained four sovereigns, on the table, and declared that that was all the money he had in the world.”

“Then he spent all he took from papa?”

“Yes. It is impossible to know how much your father gave him; but had he given him money in thousands instead of in hundreds, he would have spent every penny, in the full conviction that Dr. Fraser was a bank he could draw upon for life. He went to London, but could get no employment. He told me that he made as many as twenty applications for work of different kinds, but was invariably rejected in favour of others. One day, desperate with hunger, and having literally

no home to shelter him, he entered a shop and stole a piece of jewellery. He was captured and imprisoned."

" Dreadful ! dreadful !"

" He left prison, broken down in health, and I believe he said that he tried to enlist, but was rejected. It was impossible for him to get work at a school, for he had no clothes fit to present himself in. He then hired himself as a porter, but was dismissed ; and—hear this, Helen !—he determined to commit another crime. that he might return to prison, for he had no food, no shelter, there was no living creature to succour him outside the walls of a gaol. But whilst he wandered about the streets, he reeled and fainted, and when he recovered his consciousness he found himself in a hospital. There he has

been since January last. They thought him well enough to discharge last week, and one of the doctors gave him some money ; and as a last desperate resource he made up his mind to come to Milborough and entreat me to help him. If he found me dead or absent, or if I refused to assist him, he declares that it was his intention to kill himself."

Helen hid her face.

"He left London for Milborough, and when he reached L——, he had spent his last sixpence. He was utterly debilitated by his long confinement and illness, but plucked up courage to walk on, and arrived here last night. He told me he went to Cambridge Street, hoping that some of the poor there would understand his misery, and give him shelter and food. But half-

way down the street, his senses forsook him."

"Is he dead, Louis?"

"He was alive when I left him. But he may be dead by this time. He asked me to bring you to him. Will you come?"

She seemed to shrink for an instant, and then said, "Yes."

"It may try you, Helen."

"If he is dying, and wants me, ought I not to go?"

He said no more. She ran upstairs for her hat, and in a few minutes they were walking towards the town. They spoke little, both being lost in deep thought.

Once Louis exclaimed,—

"How wonderfully and terribly does

God manifest His power! He is all-righteous and all-wise; but oh, Helen! this is a heavy expiation!"

"Poor man!" was all Helen could answer.

The name of Creed had awakened bitter and infinitely sad recollections, and the whole past lived again in vivid and keen colours during that walk. Scene after scene arose, and brought tears to her eyes with the pale and melancholy memories with which they were stored. Yonder, far away on the other side of the town, where the shadow of a cloud darkened the brow of the hill along the dusty highway of which she had taken many a lonely walk, was the Gray House, its presence implied to her by the shadowing of the rich trees that hedged it about

upon the lightlier-coloured landscape. She saw the old study in which her father was wont to hide himself, the quaint furniture he had heaped together, the Hogarths against the wall, the strange china upon the mantelpiece. There was his chair hard by the window. She saw him watching her as she wandered companionless about the grounds, and felt again the thrill of perfect love that passed over her heart when she met his eyes. Then Creed arose, and she beheld his dark and deceptive countenance mingling in the details of her home life, and flinging, by his presence, such a shadow over her father, that he seemed to grow visionary to her gaze. Her memory now had a photographic minuteness, which made the scenes it submitted as real, as cruel, as if she actually

lived in them again, and was finding a deeper, deadlier bitterness in them by contrast with the happiness she had tasted since they had become phantoms of the past. She broke from her waking dream with a start, and grasped her husband's hand, as though to steady, by the support of his living and permanent love, the reel of her moral being from the shock of exquisite memory.

"Oh, Louis," she murmured, "it seems incredible that *this* should be the end of it all. I think of this dying man seated at papa's table, with their dreadful secret between them ; I see him smiling whilst he speaks words of which I could not gather the significance, though I know that every syllable must have tortured papa like the thrust of a dagger. I see them leave the

dining-room together, to deceive me with the belief that they were going to work at the History, but in reality to talk of their secret, whilst papa masks his breaking heart with a look of indifference, and Mr. Creed menaces his honour and life with soft-spoken words, which wrap up deadly threats like stones in snow-balls."

"But think how it ends!"

"Yes ; in degradation, starvation, and in death."

"An awful ending! Were your father alive, he could not wish it thus. A soul is leaving this world so stained with guilt, that it demands the widest, the deepest, the greatest faith in God's all-forgiving mercy to believe that He will receive a tardy death-bed repentance as an atonement for the evil it has wrought in life."

As he spoke, they reached Cambridge Street, the sordid sphere in which Helen had always exercised her most merciful charity, and knocked at Goodman's door.

This house was perhaps the least indigent and miserable of all the habitations, and yet it was difficult to conceive that decay and squalor had not forced it down to the very lowest limit of extreme poverty.

Goodman, himself pale with long sickness, received them with a humble bow, and they entered the wretched apartment.

"How is he?" whispered Louis.

"In a bad way, sir."

"He is still alive?"

"Yes, sir. The doctor is with him.

He is sinking fast. He'll soon be dead. Lord have mercy upon him."

"Go and tell the doctor I am here, Goodman."

They stood for a few moments in the dim and wretched chamber, almost bare of furniture, the rough, smoke-blackened planks of the flooring gaping under their feet, a live ember in the small crowded grate, over which simmered a saucepan, a discoloured print over the mantelpiece; and then the doctor came out of the adjacent room, a young, busy-looking man, dressed in a suit of black. He bowed to Helen, and turning to Louis, arched his eyebrows, and extended his hand with an expressive shrug.

"Have you called to see him, Mr. Haddon?"

"Yes."

"Then I should advise you to go in at once. He will be a dead man in a quarter of an hour."

"God help him!"

"I hope, Mrs. Haddon, you are not . . ." The doctor waved his hand in the direction of the sick room.

"He wishes to see me," answered Helen.

"Hardly a fit sight for a lady. Let me advise . . ."

"He need not know you are here, Helen," said Louis.

"But he has asked to see me, Louis. Come, let us go to him."

She moved towards the inner room. The doctor, with a deprecating face, bowed and went away.

"Stay where you are," Louis said to Goodman, and led the way into the dying man's presence.

When Helen saw the ghastly face upon the pillow, she stopped with a violent shudder.

Her husband's story had hardly prepared her for the change she now witnessed.

She remembered Creed as a smooth-faced man, whose olive-coloured complexion was in no way indicative of ill-health, however unpleasantly it had otherwise impressed her ; with small and glittering eyes, and long black hair smoothly brushed, and a certain dandyism of aspect—that was, after his installation in the Gray House—which suggested possibilities of cleanliness and smartness, and in some measure fulfilled them.

Now she beheld him with a ragged beard and sunken cheeks, which the protruding bones scarcely prevented from falling in complete hollows, and eyes buried in the head, without light, hardly with expression.

He looked, indeed, barely human ; and his wild, uncivilised, famished aspect, was well helped out by the surroundings of the room in which he lay dying.

The window, patched with brown paper, looked out on to a row of back yards, in which some children were playing ; their coarse cries and laughter contributed an item to the sordid conditions of the scene which heightened their misery to a degree beyond the power of words to express. He lay on an old wooden bedstead, the torn and discoloured mattress of which

was visible under the narrow, insufficient blanket—its only furniture—that covered the wretched man. The ceiling was low, and blotched with stains of damp and smoke. Near the bed stood a wooden table, with some physic upon it. His clothes lay in a heap on the floor—the coat in tatters, the boots gaping and white with the mud they had ploughed through on the previous day. The floor was uncarpetted, and along the wainscoting were large holes, over which the paper hung dropping from the wall, and stirred and rustled to the draught that came through them.

“This is kind,” he exclaimed, in a wheezing voice. “I am very ill—I am dying. I never thought I should die like this.”

"Tell us if there is anything we can do for you?" said Louis.

"But you think it deserved?" he continued, paying no heed to Louis's question.

"No," answered Helen, steadily. "We do not think so. I grieve from my heart to see you in such misery."

"Do you? Oh, but you had always a sweet nature—a very sweet nature," he said, plucking at the bed-clothes and smiling. "I remember your love for your father, and how his coldness never alienated your beautiful affection. I was never so wicked as not to appreciate your perfect character. I was crazy not to have been satisfied to worship you at a distance. I was a fiend, ugly and venomous, and tried to pass the circle God had drawn around

you. And this is all that has come of it." He lifted up his thin hand and gazed at it earnestly, even with curiosity. Then dropping it, he added, "I bitterly wronged your father, and if I am to die . . . I should like you to forgive me."

"You are forgiven, and were my father alive he would forgive you," replied Helen, in a voice that trembled, despite her efforts to control it.

"There is a God," gasped the wretched man; "and He knows that I was tempted—good men have fallen—and He has avenged your father. Look at me!"

He extended his shaking, skeleton hand, and Helen took it.

"Pray to Him," she whispered earnestly. "Ask Him to forgive you. You have suffered much—He is merciful, and

will remember your sufferings. Ask His forgiveness now—now, that He may know your repentance is sincere.”

She trembled with eagerness, raising her eyes in a mute appeal to God, as though she would meet half-way the Divine message of forgiveness.

His lips muttered inaudibly.

Then he spoke aloud, in a low, breathless tone,—

“No one will ever know but Him how I have suffered. I have walked the streets night and day, starving. I have been cold and drenched with the rain, and have stood at windows, and looked within upon people seated around the blazing hearth, and have said, ‘Is there a God?—is there a God? Why, sitting in His kingdom, Lord of the lives and happiness

of the creatures He has made, does He suffer such misery as mine to shiver under His skies, and offer no relief? I stood, faint and famished, in a back street, and watched a dog gnawing a bone. I crept towards the animal, and seized the bone. He growled and bit me. I would to God he had torn me to pieces."

He began to sob; but he was past the power of shedding tears.

They stood watching him, incapable of speech.

"It was an evil day," he muttered, "when I first went to the Gray House. I was an innocent man until I was tempted. Ay, sir, don't reproach me. Go—leave me now. In God's name, go!" he shrieked, gesticulating with both hands. "I am starved to death, I say! will not that please

you? Oh, sir, you are a doctor; you know the lingering agony of famine—the swimming head, the glazed eye, the bloodless face, the craving that turns to sickness—to deadly sickness. Bid him leave me!” he yelled, sitting upright, and pointing to a corner of the room. “Look, they are together! Did I do it? Wipe that smeared face of his, doctor, and toss the matted hair out of his eyes—he is horrible so!” His voice softened; he pleaded, with the perspiration gathering in drops upon his forehead—“Bid them leave me—they are beckoning! Bid them leave me!”

There was something so real in his agony, that Helen involuntarily turned to look in the direction he pointed.

“Aye, they are there—do you not see them?” he shrieked. “Motion him away.

They are hand-in-hand. You loved him, and your love should give you power. Oh, that dead face! . . . I tell you that I have known deeper misery than the greatest criminal—will not that avail?—starving and cold—and all alone, under the dark arches, listening to the river—hush! you may hear it trickling now!—hush!—it is cold—cold—Oh, Jesus! what is this?”

He fell back upon his pillow, grasping his breast; then put his arm up as though warding off a blow. His breath came and went quickly as a baby's, then ceased; he rolled his eyes upwards, and, with one deep sob, expired.

THE END.

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